The VIRGIN BIRTH

F. P. RAMSAY

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THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The Virgin Birth

A Study of the Argument, For and Against

By

F. PIERCE RAMSAY, Ph. D.

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DEDICATED
to
MARY ELLEN (MEBANE) RAMSAY,
whose presence was,
whose memory is,
my inspiration

PREFACE

IT is a time of inquiry and controversy. Earnest minds differ. How shall they help one another?

Not by impugning motives or belittling arguments; nor by silence. They can help one another by discussion; by each presenting his views and reasons, and by all hearing with respect and weighing with solicitude. For who can seek for the truth without solicitude? and who can reason with his brothers without respect?

In this spirit this book is offered as at least a contribution to that fraternal debate which is the only way to peace. If any will point out to me its defects, I will thank them. If any get help out of it, I shall be grateful.

F. P. R.

Staten Island,
N. Y.

"Dr. Ramsay has brought a wealth of scholarship to this task. The dominant thought in the mind of the author, which is clearly displayed in the book itself, was a desire to bring forth from the Holy Scriptures what is the clear teaching concerning this important doctrine of evangelical faith. The presentation is forceful, cumulative and convincing."—Walter D. Buchanan, D.D., *Pastor, Broadway Presbyterian Church, New York City.*

"The book displays scholarship as well as literary grace, I have re-read some parts of it several times. With the general contention of the book I would find myself in some disagreement, but I commend the author's conciliatory manner of approaching the question, his effort to state both sides, and his evident irenic spirit. It is a scholarly argument."—Henry Sloane Coffin, D.D., *Pastor, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City.*

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I

INTRODUCTORY

IT is held by some that Jesus Christ was begotten by a man and born of a woman in the ordinary way. They may admit that there were some influences or forces in His origin of a more or less extraordinary nature; but they deny that there was such an exception in His case that physiologically He was without a human father. Those who hold this view may say that they are not under obligations to prove it, but only to keep others from disproving it. They may sit still, and ask that evidence be brought to overthrow it.

But if Jesus Christ is Himself extraordinary in His capacities and powers, so extraordinary as to be an exception to human beings generally in what He is, He may also be an exception in how He came to be. The higher the place we ascribe to Him, the greater becomes the possibility that there may be something in His origin that will help to explain His uniqueness. The miracle of His personality may make the miracle of His origin a question. It is unscientific, then, for those who give to Him a unique position above all men to sit still and refuse themselves to inquire whether there may not be something unique in His origin; and if there is something unique in His origin, what it is.

On the other hand, there are those who hold that

Jesus Christ had no human father, although He had a human mother. Those who hold this view cannot claim to establish the fact on the mere ground that the fact is necessary to explain or account for the uniqueness in the personality of Jesus. Admitted that there must be something unique in His origin, that unique thing may not be His birth from a virgin while she was still a virgin. The only scientific method, is to seek for the evidences of the fact, if such evidences there are, and to rest belief in the fact on the evidences for the fact. If we knew this extraordinary thing in His origin, we might infer that there would be something extraordinary in His person; but we cannot reason back from effect to cause so certainly. A given cause can have but one effect; but a given effect may have one or another cause. If we find Jesus Christ to be an exception in powers and character, we may indeed infer something exceptional in His origin; but just what that exceptional thing must be we cannot infer.

It is therefore obligatory upon those who hold to His Virgin Birth to show evidence that He was thus born, and adequate evidence. In the absence of such evidence it is strictly scientific to withhold belief in the fact; and those are not to be condemned as unreasonable or unduly skeptical who remain in doubt until the adequate evidence is produced. Surely if so unique an event took place and is of essential importance to full faith in Jesus Christ that adequate evidence will be available.

There is, therefore, but one course for us all to follow. We must examine and weigh the evidences

bearing on the question, determined to find the truth, whatever that may be. If the evidence shows that He was virgin born, then it would be a pity for us not to find it out; and give the fact its full significance in our system of truth. If the evidence is such as to leave the question indeterminable, we must be content with our ignorance, accepting so much fact as is given and no more, with all intellectual humility. And if the evidence shuts us up to the rejection of His Virgin Birth, let us rejoice to discover that this superstition has hitherto beclouded the nature of His work and Character, and to come into clearer comprehension of what He really is and does. The truth cannot take from us any worthy belief.

I aim, therefore, first of all, to make inquiry for all the evidence, and to sift it and weigh it. I cannot assume that there is nothing to be found with a bearing on the question in the Old Testament, and nothing in the New Testament outside of the Gospels, and nothing in the Gospels outside of Matthew and Luke. And I must not by forced interpretation make that out to be evidence which is not evidence at all. My first business is to get the evidence. The absence of evidence may itself be evidence; but I must first sweep the field of possible evidence clean, before I conclude for the absence of evidence. I will therefore search the Scripture through.

But here arises a question, whether Scripture is historic, whether it is throughout trustworthy history, or to what extent it is trustworthy history;

and to take a position on this question may itself be equivalent to deciding the question of the Virgin Birth in advance. One mind may hold such general views of Scripture that, if a single isolated statement anywhere in the Bible affirms the Virgin Birth, such isolated statement would be to him sufficient evidence; another mind may hold such views in general of Scripture that a definite statement in even several places, and an integral part of the narrative where such statements occur, would not be to him sufficient evidence. It seems to me, therefore, the better course to hear the witnesses first, and then pass upon their competency.

I will therefore endeavor to get what is said, and to estimate the weight of it as we proceed, postponing a decision and returning to make a decision, on the validity of supposed evidence, until we have the total evidence before us, sifted and weighed, and can make our decision on its adequacy or inadequacy as a whole. It may be that in this process we shall get some well grounded estimate of the reliability of Scripture in general.

If our inquiry should lead us to the conclusion that the evidence is not adequate for certifying to us so extraordinary a fact, this negative conclusion will itself have an important place in our general estimate of the worth of Scripture, and of the teachings of Scripture; and may be able to construct or reconstruct a system of beliefs.

But then we shall have the task of holding in restraint the tendency to abandon too much when we are forced to abandon something of what we

have held before; and to inquire what of the Christian system remains.

On the other hand, if we conclude in favor of the Virgin Birth, as an adequately attested fact, we shall then need to inquire into the bearing of this fact on this and that teaching, and place the fact in our system of beliefs.

But it will remain for us to consider objections to the fact, when we have seen it in its relations and bearings.

All these steps are necessary to a satisfactory examination of this question. I must, therefore, warn some of my readers that the discussion will be largely, especially in the earlier part of it, rather a severely critical examination of evidence, requiring minute investigations into the significance of Hebrew and Greek words and sentences. I cannot make my book readable except to those who are willing to take pains. Have patience with me, and by your patience help me through the hard and difficult part. But if you are not willing to work and think, shut up the book, and give it to some one who is willing to labor for light.

I do not mean to claim for myself too much. I do claim the ability to make at least a contribution to the investigation of this question; otherwise I would not presume to write this book. I am liable to error; and I am liable to make mistakes in my search for the truth. My work is a contribution; let some better mind improve upon it. But if I can help some earnest student in his inquiry, and guide some devout mind to peace in this agitation, if I

can but point the direction to the safe landing out of this sea of controversy, I am content.

And I do confess to a profound faith in Jesus Christ, whom I accept as the Lord of my life, and to whom and to whose faithful people I crave to do some little service.

II

OLD TESTAMENT EXPECTATIONS

I. The Expectation in Genesis

SOME people will come to Genesis, believing it to be a book by Moses that gives a true history of certain origins; and some will come to it, believing it to be a comparatively late compilation of stories that had grown up before being committed to writing, and were altered and adopted by certain religious teachers to purposes of written instruction, but that are in no proper sense narratives of fact. And some will come to Genesis, believing it to be a compilation of stories that originated in close connection with the events and from the witnesses of the events, that were handed down with scrupulous accuracy till compiled, and that were compiled with scrupulous fidelity, and therefore believing the book to be trustworthy history. Whether one makes the book Mosaic in its origin, or post-Mosaic, or pre-Mosaic; and whether one accepts it as good history or regards it as largely myth: here it is now, and here it was before the New Testament came into existence; and it was accepted by the Jews generally as an integral part of their Scriptures. Let us see what it would teach them.

Gen. 3: contains a story about Adam and Eve

and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had been created, and placed in the Garden to cultivate it; and they had been commanded not to eat of a certain tree of knowing good and evil on pain of death. There came to the woman Eve a serpent, that persuaded her that eating of this tree would not bring death but wonderful enlightenment, and induced her to eat of it. She in turn induced the man Adam to eat of it also. They became ashamed in their nakedness, which they endeavored to cover by sewing fig leaves together; and when they heard the sound of their Great Friend coming to them in the cool of the day, they hid away among the trees of the Garden. But He called them to account, and heard the excuse of the man, and then the confession of the woman. Thereupon He addressed the serpent, the woman, and the man, each in turn, and gave sentence. He sentenced the serpent to perpetual degradation; the woman to pain in her function of child-bearing; and the man to toil and death. Adam gave his wife a name that indicated that she was to become the mother of the race; and Jehovah God made clothing for them out of the skins of animals. And then He expelled them from the Garden.

In 3: 15, in sentencing the serpent, Jehovah God said, " And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Whether we take this story as a poetic myth, or as a narrative of fact as the fact appeared to Adam and Eve, here it is; and here it was in the sacred literature. What is the meaning of the

promise that the seed of the woman shall bruise, or crush, the head of the serpent?

There is to be perpetual enmity between the two races, the serpent and his seed and the woman and her seed. What the serpent was, and what his seed was to be, are questions rather raised than answered; but the serpent, whether the being who appeared in the form of a serpent in this story or is symbolized by a serpent in this story, is the great enemy of the woman and her seed; and to crush the head of this great enemy and his seed would be something like salvation for her and hers. It may be that the seed of the serpent will include the seed of the man, if the seed of the man should turn out to have a serpent-like nature; but standing here in the midst of the story, we cannot be sure of its future development.

We have assumed that the seed of the woman means her descendants; but does it mean the joint descendants of her and the man? It may be so. But we observe that the seed of the man is not mentioned in the story. If the seed of the man means the joint seed of the man and woman, the ability of this seed to crush the head of the serpent is by reason of its being her seed, and not by reason of its being his seed. It is the seed of the woman that shall crush the head of the serpent.

This may be figurative language. If so, why does the figure assign to the woman's seed the crushing of the serpent's head, and not to the man's seed, or to the seed of the man and woman?

The meaning of the promise is obscure; but in the

obscurity one distinction is clear, that the crushing of the head of the serpent is not assigned to Adam's seed, but to the woman's seed, whether to all her descendants, or to some of them, or to one of them. Much is obscure, but this one thing is clear in all the obscurity, that the woman's seed is put forward for crushing the head of the serpent and his seed, and not the man's seed. It is the seed of the woman that shall crush the head of the serpent.

In Gen. 4: 1 and 25 Eve says at the birth of her first son, " I have gotten a man with *the help of* Jehovah," and at the birth of Seth after Cain killed Abel, " God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel." Even if we accept as correct the rendering given of the first passage, instead of " I have gotten a man, Jehovah," or " I have gotten a man, the Coming One," the passage indicates that she in some way took the birth of Cain to be a fulfilment of the promise of 3: 15. And the second passage indicates that, Abel having taken the place of Cain in her confidence, Seth now took the place of Abel, and that she still looked for some fulfilment of the promised in the birth of her children. It is now evident that she did not understand the promise to mean her offspring to the exclusion of Adam's offspring, and that she did not fully understand the promise. It still remains that the promise contains the peculiar mention of her seed instead of his seed or their seed, and the exact significance of this peculiarity has not yet appeared. So far we have the idea of a promised seed that will bring the destruction of the serpent at the cost of great hurt to himself, a seed in some special sense the woman's.

In Gen. 12: 1-3 is recorded the first great promise of Abram, that Jehovah would make of him a great nation, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. In verse 7 the promise is enlarged, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." In 13: 14-17 the promise is confirmed as to both the numerous seed and the land. While nothing is said about his seed crushing the head of the serpent, we must not count Gen. 3: 15 as unknown to Abram. It stood in the records inherited by him, although now there is a new development of a promise to his seed; but whether the two seeds are to be one seed, or to be distinct, each having its distinctive task, remains yet to be made clear. But one thing is now clear, that Abram's seed is not to be mankind in general, but a selected part of mankind.

In Gen. 15: Jehovah converts the promise to Abram and his seed into a Covenant. This seed, in which all nations are to be blessed, is itself to suffer something of hardship, which reminds us of Gen. 3: 15. But it is remarkable that Abram is represented as being at the time childless, and that his promised seed is yet to be born. From Gen. 25: 1-5 we infer that he had at the time sons by Koturah, his concubine; but for some reason they were not counted at all as his seed of promise. And Ishmael, his son by Hagar, a substitute wife, is also rejected from being the seed of promise (Gen. 17: 18-21). And Isaac is chosen, the son of Sarah, the wife.

These four things are true of Isaac. In the first

place, his mother was wife in the fullest sense. Thus was honor put upon the wife as over against the substitute wife and the concubine. In the second place, he was a son of circumcision; Abraham was circumcised before he begot Isaac. As circumcision was the consecration specially of the male organ of generation, it is assumed or taught that the human male needs some special purification in order to become the progenitor of the promised seed. But the woman was not circumcised. Does this hint that human corruption is transmitted through the male and not through the female? In the third place, while Abraham is the father of Isaac, yet the birth was miraculous, the natural powers of fatherhood and motherhood being now dead, so that Isaac appears in the history as in a special sense a son of God. And in the fourth place, his mother had never had any child before; so that she might be taken as prefiguring a woman impregnated by God himself. Undoubtedly these are but hints, if they are so much as hints, towards what mystery was wrapped up in the protevangelium, the promise of Gen. 3: 15. One cannot say that here are indications of a purely virgin birth yet to be; but one feels that here are indications of something extraordinary yet to be.

And we find that special care was taken in selecting the mothers of the chosen race, as in the case of the wives of Isaac and Jacob.

Genesis does not give us much, and we may say does not give us anything decisive, on this matter; but at the most only some germinal truth, which

in the course of development may yet become the doctrine of a virgin birth.

II. THE MESSIANIC EXPECTATION

In our study of Genesis we saw an expectation of salvation through a seed yet to be born; and we have seen that this seed is not the whole human race, but is within Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob, and that this seed is to have something remarkable in its birth, and to be in some distinctive sense the seed of the woman. This expectation becomes more closely defined as we proceed down through the Old Testament.

We may take as our new point of departure I Sam. 2: 10. It is the last verse of Hannah's hymn of rejoicing over the birth of Samuel:

"They that strive with Jehovah shall be broken to pieces;
Against them will be thunder in heaven:
Jehovah will judge the ends of the earth;
And he will give strength unto his king,
And exalt the horn of his Anointed."

Here are two new ideas, the idea in Jehovah's King, and the idea in Jehovah's Anointed; for heretofore Jehovah was himself to be the king of Israel, and heretofore the priest was the anointed one. Now there is to be a king under Jehovah, and he, rather than the highpriest, is to be Jehovah's anointed. The anointing was a symbol of special appointment and enduement for office. And in verse 35, he promises to raise up a faithful priest, who "shall walk before mine Anointed." Thus the Anointed King is distinguished from the priest.

Now this Hebrew word *anointed* is spelled out in English *messiah;* and we might well substitute Messiah for Anointed in the above passage, and in other like passages. So the Greek word *christos,* or *Christ,* has the same meaning. The Hebrew Messiah, the Greek Christ, and the English Anointed have the same meaning.

The first of the Messiahs, Jehovah's kings of Israel, was Saul (I Sam. 12: 3, 5). Then Samuel was sent to the family at Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons to this office (16:1, 6); and he anointed David. David did not at once displace Saul (I Sam. 24: 6, 10; 26: 9, 11, 16, 23), but as long as Saul lived acknowledged him as the Messiah (II Sam. 1: 14, 16); but afterward was by solemn anointing acknowledged as the king of Israel by the elders of the people (II Sam. 5: 3).

In II Sam. 7: a special revelation is given to David, that his shall be a perpetual dynasty, so that forever a descendant of his shall be on the throne of Israel (verses 12-16). Moreover, Jehovah promised that the son of David should be Jehovah's son and he would be the father of David's son (verse 1-4). We now have a perpetual dynasty of kings of Israel, each Jehovah's Messiah, and standing to him as son to a father. Here is the idea that the Messiah is to be, in some special sense, Jehovah's son. And hereafter David is called Jehovah's Messiah (II Sam. 19: 21; 22: 52; 23: 1. Also II Chr. 6: 42).

This idea of the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom bulks largely in the Psalms. Take Ps. 2: 2, 6, 7:

The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against Jehovah, and against his Messiah.
* * * * * * *
Yet have I set my king
Upon my holy hill of Zion.
I will tell you of the decree:
Jehovah said to me, Thou art my son;
This day have I begotten thee.

Note especially that the Messiah is Jehovah's begotten son. He is to have universal dominion, and to rule in righteousness, being Jehovah's king, set upon the throne by him; but especially is he to be the begotten Son of God.

These ideas occur again and again throughout the Psalms. Jehovah is King (10: 16), but the Messiah is "his king," appointed by him to rule over his kingdom (18: 50; 20: 6). The Messiah is even called God (45: 6), with just how much significance we cannot say; but from being his Son he is made God himself. Along with this comes in the idea of perpetual continuance. Ps. 45: 6,

Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever:
A scepter of equity is the scepter of thy kingdom.

And this idea of perpetual continuance is emphasized in Ps. 72. Here there is expectation of a Messiah who will have no successor, but will in his own person continue forever.

Compare also 84: 9; 89: 38, 51; 132: 10, 17; and other like passages, especially 145: 13. The Psalter develops the idea of the Messiah and his kingdom, until he becomes the perpetual king of an everlasting kingdom; he is raised to the dignity of the begotten Son of God; he is even made God.

When we turn to the Prophets, we shall find much, more or less obscure, concerning this Hope of Israel. Let us take Isaiah. Our attention cannot but be arrested by 7: 14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Immanuel is Hebrew for "God with us." Leaving some questions about this passage for future consideration, we now remark, that this is a *sign,* an indication or proof of the authenticity of the prophet's message; that to the prophet's mind there was something remarkable in that a "virgin" should bear a son; and that the significance of the name Immanuel applied to her son was meant to indicate something worthy of special attention. The one impression that the passage unmistakably was intended to make is that there is to be something extraordinary about the birth of some great person.

With this passage we must put 9: 6, 7, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever." One can hardly resist the conviction that this has to do with the same birth as 7: 14. And that this Child is to sit "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom," identifies him with the Messiah. The names of the

Child are worthy of our meditation: Wonderful (miraculous); Counselor; Mighty God (which ascribes deity to him even more emphatically than Ps. 45: 6); Everlasting Father (or, Father of Eternity, which clinches his deity); Prince of Peace (which identifies this Child with the person described in 2: 2-4 and its parallel in Mi. 4: 1-3). The Messianic idea has now been developed into a definite personality who is both the son of David and the Son of God, being God as well as man.

11: 1-5, which begins "And there shall come a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit," manifestly handling the same conception as 7: 14 and 9: 6, teaches us that this great Coming One will be a son of David's fallen house. Here the human is made prominent, as in 9: 6 the divine, in this paradoxical personality.

This union of the divine and the human is expressed or assumed in many passages; and seems to cause no embarrassment to the prophets.

Although Isaiah for some reason is chary of using the term Messiah (though he is full of the idea), yet the term is used by the prophets. An instance is Hab. 3:13,

> Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people,
> For the salvation of thine Anointed.

Jer. 23: 5 develops the conception of the Branch (cf. Isa. 11: 1) so also 33: 15f. And Lam. 4: 20 again uses Messiah as in Samuel.

Passing over Ezekiel and Daniel and the other Prophets, though rich in material, we will con-

clude with some examination of Zechariah. He has much to say about the Branch in 3: 8 and 6: 12. Take especially the conception of 6: 12, 13, "and he shall be a priest upon his throne," that the king of Israel shall also be the priest, which will greatly help us to understand the paradox of the humiliation and the glory of the Messiah. In 9: 9 we see the King not as a warrior, but as a peaceful administrator of justice, and in 14: 17 we see him as the all-conquering King.

The Old Testament created the conception of a Coming One, who should be divine and human, a conqueror and a sufferer, a king and a priest, God and man, a woman's Child and the Son of God.

III. ISAIAH 7: 14

The passage deserves special examination (Isa. 7: 10-17): "And Jehovah spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, when he knoweth to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken. Jehovah will bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and

upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—*even* the king of Assyria."

The prophet offers in Jehovah's name a sign to king Ahaz, something that would confirm the prophet's advice against alliance with Assyria, a miraculous indication; and he offers to give this sign anywhere that Ahaz might select, even to give it in the sea or in the sky. Ahaz declined to ask a sign, hypocritically pretending that he was not willing thus to make trial of Jehovah as if he doubted him. Then the prophet, after rebuking the hypocrisy, said, "The Lord himself will give you a sign," a miraculous indication. This is the first point: the prophet proposes a miracle, a wonder, something extraordinary.

He proceeds to tell what the sign shall be: "behold, the virgin." The word "the" is in the Hebrew and in the Septuagint version's Greek, though there is some question whether in the English idiom the rendering should be "the virgin" or "a virgin." If the proper rendering is "the virgin," it would seem probable that some particular virgin was referred to, who was known to Ahaz and Isaiah. I surmise a daughter of Ahaz that he was withholding from marriage, or some princess or maiden that he was refusing to let become the wife of his son. But this is conjecture; and our interpretation must not build upon conjecture.

We need to examine carefully the meaning of the Hebrew word here rendered "virgin," and of two other terms. One is *naarah,* girl, fem. of *naar,* boy. If this term *naarah* (or *naara*) is used, it does not

imply either virginity or the lack of virginity; but the term may be used generally of a young woman, cf. Gen. 24: 14.

Another term is *bethulah,* which is used 50 times in the Old Testament, and its related term *bethulim* is used 10 times. This *bethulim* seems to be always used in the sense of virginity. *Bethulah* is certainly the common Hebrew word for virgin; but that this is its distinctive meaning in all cases is doubtful. When Jb. 31: 1 says, "How then shall I look upon a *bethulah?*", is it certain that he had in mind distinctly a virgin? In the phrase "young man and *bethulah*" (Deut. 32: 25; II Chr. 36: 17; Ps. 148: 12; Am. 8: 13; Isa. 23: 4; Jer. 51: 22; Lam. 1: 18; 2: 21) is not *bethulah* equivalent simply to young woman? *Bethulah* may be used of any woman who is a virgin, of whatever age; but to stress the idea of virginity something may be added, as in Gen. 24: 16, "neither had any man known her." So in Judg. 21:12. And in order to stress the idea of youth, some term is added, as in Judg. 21: 12; I Ki. 1: 2; Est. 2: 2, 3. In the phrase "Young man and *bethulah,*" would be included any man of marital age, say up to forty years, and any *bethulah* up to a like age. We therefore want a term that will mean virgin recently become marriageable, without need of an additional word to stress either the idea of virginity or of youth.

Let us examine the term, *almah.* The word is used 7 times, not counting the *alamoth* in the superscription of Ps. 46: and in I Chr. 15: 20. In Gen. 24: 43, the servant of Abraham, in speaking of

Rebekah to her parents and brother, uses the term *almah,* although in verse 14f he had referred to her as *naara;* for he delicately stresses now that she is a virgin. Here he is careful not to use an ambiguous term. In Ex. 2: 8 Miriam is called *almah.* Here the word may have implied only her youth or her virginity or both. If youth had been the special connotation, *naarah* would probably have been used. In Ps. 68: 25,

"The singers went before, the minstrels followed after,
In the midst of the damsels playing with timbrels,"

"damsels" translates the pl. of *almah.* Here certainly the poet did not use a term that would not imply virgins; but *almah* is used, because young virgins are thought of. In Prov. 30: 19, "the way of a man with a maiden" (*almah*), virginity is implied from the next sentence. And of course in Cant. 1: 3 and 6: 8 the word means virgins, young virgins.

I am well aware that many Hebraists say that the proper word in Hebrew for virgin is *bethulah,* and that *almah* really means young woman of marriageable age. But from a careful examination of the usage of these two words in their every occurrence, I am convinced that, while *bethulah* means a virgin without emphasizing youth especially, and is sometimes used loosely without distinctly implying virginity, *almah* is never used without strictly implying virginity as well as youth; and the usage of a word must prevail over its etymology for determining its meaning. And it is not certain that

the etymology of either of these terms points to virgin or away from it as its meaning. I am content to agree with the Greek scholars who translated the Old Testament from the Hebrew into the Greek some centuries before Christ, a translation known as the Septuagint.

Hence the prophet had two words in Hebrew that he might use: *bethulah,* which would have meant a virgin of any age, though not with so absolute a connotation of virginity as might be desirable; and *almah,* which means a virgin, with implication of youth, and, from its usage in Hebrew, would seem to have no other possible meaning. This is the word that the prophet uses here. When the Greek translators came to this word, they had no word in Greek of just this meaning, and had to use the Greek term that means virgin. If *almah* had meant, as some now contend, a young woman without implying virginity, they had words in Greek that would have expressed this idea; but they used none of these words, but used the proper Greek term for virgin. And if Isaiah had used a Hebrew word that simply meant young woman without implying virginity, then he would have given to Ahaz nothing remarkable at all. For to say that a young woman would have a son would not be to say that anything remarkable would take place.

" Behold, a virgin shall conceive." It is disputed whether this should be rendered *shall conceive* or *hath conceived.* But this will not greatly affect our interpretation; for it would only be to raise the question whether the conception had already taken place or was yet to take place. It is doubtful

whether this question is raised and settled by the tense used by the prophet. But to say a virgin conceives, if there is something extraordinary meant, is to say that a virgin while still a virgin conceives. This is precisely the miraculous element in the sign.

"And bear a son." If Isaiah was speaking of a definite virgin, the fact that the child was to be a son and not a daughter might enter in as a subordinate element in the miracle.

"And shall call his name Immanuel" might in some connections mean merely to express the faith of the namer that God is with us, with his people, that being the meaning of the word Immanuel. But in the connection in which it here occurs, it must at least mean that this child is a sign or promise that at some time a child who is God with us shall be born. In other words, here is an unmistakable prediction of the birth from a virgin of a child who will be God.

The prophet goes on to say that before the child shall be old enough to discriminate between foods, the land of Syria and Ephraim will be forsaken, the enemies against whom Ahaz was seeking Assyria's help, and that the Assyrian power will come against Ahaz. This implies that the sign will take place in the immediate future. But inasmuch as Ahaz declined to ask for a sign, and there is no record in Isaiah that this sign was actually given, it is possible to understand that here was merely the offer of such a sign, but that the miracle did not then actually occur. But if so, some such miracle is here

foreshadowed to occur in the process of Israel's salvation.

The Davidic dynasty is failing to produce righteous kings in succession by the ordinary processes of propagation. Ahaz himself is a conspicuous instance of this failure. Such a man cannot be the ideal Messiah, nor bring in the ideal deliverance and righteousness. And the prophet is driven to turn away from all sons of David begotten by human fathers, to give a closer definition to "the seed of the woman" of the protevangelium of Gen. 3: 15, and to expect that the Savior will be a virgin's son and not a man's, and will be God with us and not mere man with us. Thus will the Old Testament expectation be realized in a Messiah who is God.

Such being the expectation raised by the Old Testament teaching, we may be sure that the men of the New Testament, claiming fulfilment, will tell of some such miraculous birth. There is no need to go outside of Old Testament ideas and teachings to find the conception of the Virgin Birth. Those who accept Jesus as the Messiah of the Old Testament expectation must at least raise the question whether he was virgin-born.

III

NEW TESTAMENT TESTIMONY

I. THE TESTIMONY OF MARY

IF the Virgin Birth actually took place, there was in the nature of the case one witness that might testify to the fact, Mary herself. Let us first hear her testimony, which is given in Lk. 1: 26-56 and 2: 4-7:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou art highly favored, the Lord *is* with thee. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God. And behold, Elisabeth thy

kinswoman, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren. For no word from God shall be void of power. And Mary said, Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, unto a city of Judah; and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; and she lifted up her voice with a loud cry, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? For behold, when the voice of thy salutation came into mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said,

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath looked upon the low estate of his hand maid:
For behold, from henceforth all nations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
And holy is his name.
And his mercy is unto generations and generations
Of them that fear him.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart.
He hath put down princes from *their* thrones,
And hath exalted them of low degree.

The hungry he hath filled with good things;
And the rich he hath sent empty away.
He hath given help to Israel his servant,
That he might remember mercy
(As he spake unto our fathers)
Toward Abraham and his seed for ever.

And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned unto her house.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enroll himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child. And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary testifies, that at the time of the visitation of the angel she was a pure virgin, and that she became with child without having intercourse with a man; but her testimony to this as a fact would not in itself establish the fact beyond all doubt, even if we believed in her veracity. In such a case, we desire clear and conclusive evidence. Her direct testimony is at least one and a necessary element in the evidence for the fact.

She testifies that she had a visit from the angel Gabriel. She would infer that it was an angel that spoke to her, and remember that he called himself Gabriel. How she could tell that it was an angel, we cannot say; but that whoever spoke to her called himself Gabriel she could tell. But Gabriel

would be identified in her mind with the Gabriel of Dan. 8: 16 and 9: 21, who foretold to Daniel the coming of the Messiah (9: 25). Her report of what passed between the angel and herself naturally omits something; but it is evident that she was impressed with the dignity of the messenger, and the solemnity and greatness of his message, even before he declared it. It troubled her humility that she was, in some special sense, so highly favored of the Lord, that such a messenger should salute her in such terms.

She testifies that he specially and plainly said that she was going to conceive in her womb, and bear a son, and call his name Joshua (which in Greek spelled Jesus). Note the three points: conception; the birth of a son; and the name Jesus. She testifies that all these three points were told her in this interview. Moreover she testifies that she was told then by Gabriel, that her son should be great; that he should be called the Son of the Most High; that he should be the successor to the throne of David; and that he should reign forever. Notice the points of importance: that he should be the Son of God; and that he should be the Messiah of the Davidic line.

In explanation of how she should become a mother without intercourse with a man, the angel told her that the Holy Spirit should come upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadow her; that the thing thus begotten in her should be a holy thing; and that this holy thing thus begotten should for that reason be called the Son of God. It is important to note that the child was to be called the

Son of God because it was begotten by God as its father and not by a human father.

Mary also testifies that she was told that Elisabeth was then in her sixth month of pregnancy with a son (John the Baptist); that she at once hastened to visit Elisabeth; and that, when Elisabeth heard her salutation, she immediately declared that Mary was the mother of her Lord, and that her own babe leaped in her womb for joy at the salutation.

Mary testifies that she herself broke out in a hymn of praise to God for his condescending grace to her, a hymn which is but a new version of Hannah's hymn as contained in I Sam. 2: 1-11.

Mary remained with her cousin Elisabeth three months, or nearly up to the birth of Elisabeth's son, and then returned to her own home in Nazareth.

And Mary testifies to the birth of her son, her firstborn, in Bethlehem, and to laying him, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in a manger.

The story is manifestly Mary's own story; she believed it herself to be true; she was guileless, simple, humble, and utterly sincere. She believed herself to be the virgin mother of the Christ.

This is a woman's story. It goes into the how of the conception, relates the communing of the two prospective mothers, and mentions about the infant's swaddling clothes. The character of Mary as it here appears is thoroughly consistent with her character as it appears elsewhere in the Gospels. The poem, seeing that it is an adaptation of Hannah's hymn, is not beyond Mary's power of com-

position. The story does not have any element that might cause in us a suspicion of its sincerity; its modesty fails to attempt to paint at all the coming upon her of divine power; and it does not bring in a single unnecessary wonder of any sort in connection with the conception, the nine months of pregnancy, or the birth itself. The story is modest, simple, straightforward, sincere, consistent, and reasonable.

That is, if such a thing ever did happen it could hardly have happened and been witnessed in a more credible way. For note the confirmatory facts: that the aged Elisabeth was with child; that each woman was to bear a son (if one had turned out to be a daughter, see how the whole complex story would have been discredited); the acknowledgment of Elisabeth, recognizing Mary as the mother of the Messiah; and the combination of circumstances eventuating in the birth of the child in Bethlehem. When we reflect that here was the independent revelation to the parents of John the Baptist, and to Joseph also, we must admit that if Mary herself went through the experiences that she here so convincingly relates she would have been utterly unreasonable not to have believed herself to be indeed the virgin mother of the Christ.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF JOSEPH

If the story of the Virgin Birth as reported from Mary is true, the testimony of Joseph may confirm it. His testimony is given in Mat. 1: 18-25:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph,

before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son,
And they shall call his name Immanuel;

which is, being interpreted, God with us. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and he knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS.

It must be noted that for *conceived* the margin tells us that the Greek means "begotten." And also we must observe that the terms *husband* and *wife* are the Greek terms for "man" and "woman," and do not imply that the marriage had taken place.

Note the points of the testimony, that Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married; that before the marriage he found out that she was with child; that he was meditating a private breaking of the engagement without, as the law allowed him to do, bringing her into court for punishment with death; (Lev. 20: 10, the law applying to the betrothed persons as well as married persons, probably); that while he was thus thinking he had a dream; that

in the dream an angel spoke to him; and that he took what the angel said as a message from God.

In all this there is nothing unreasonable; but we can but raise the question whether Joseph was mistaken in considering his dream a revelation from God. This we may decide better after seeing what he was told by the angel.

First, the angel called him "son of David." This he was; and this he would be thinking of. It is not strange that this should come before him in a dream. The remarkable thing is that this thought should arise when his mind was troubled over Mary's condition. Had he already had the hope that he might be the father of the Messiah, the Christ? If so, that hope would seem to him blasted by what appeared to be Mary's infidelity. It was into his mind thus troubled that the thought was put that he was the son of David, in the line of whose descendants the Christ was to be born.

He received this assurance, that that which was begotten in her was not begotten by any human father, but by the Holy Spirit. He knew Mary; he had had all confidence in her; he had cherished all hopes to come from his marriage with her. But the fact had forced him to the conclusion that she was unworthy; and yet how could he believe that she was unworthy? His determination not to bring her to justice, although he was a righteous man, indicates some doubt after all perhaps, a doubt not articulately expressed to himself, yet a real doubt of his own conclusion. Here was opened to him a solution of his doubt; here was a fact that exculpated Mary, and turned her condition into a ground

of greatest expectation, if only Joseph were willing not to be the father of the Christ, but his foster father. The assurance of this fact came to him in his sleep, and remained when he awoke.

The angel told him that she should bring forth a son. If after his marriage with her, she had brought forth a daughter, all the assurance generated in the dream would have been shattered; but when she did bring forth a son, his assurance was confirmed.

The angel told him to call the name of the child Jesus (Joshua). When he afterward learned from Mary that she also had received the same command concerning the name of her son, this would be another confirmation.

It is remarkable that Joseph in a dream could receive the conception that this Messianic son was not to be a warrior like Joshua had been, but a savior of his people from their sins. This conception argues for Joseph a mind of deep spirituality and of profound insight.

The angel told him that the child's birth would be in fulfilment of the Virgin prediction of Isa. 7: 14. Here this passage is linked up with the fact. Joseph could hardly have had the conception, if the conception was peculiar to his mind; it was probably a conception that other minds shared with him, although probably there was some haziness and uncertainty in their understanding of the Isaiah passage.

I have assumed that the dream was the dream of a mind prepared for it by his waking thoughts and subconscious hopes and fears. At the same time in some way the dream was to Joseph an ob-

jective presentation by an angel; and in some way he was made to feel certain of the revelation, and he acted upon it. And when he found that it fitted in with the more objective revelation that Mary received, independently and separately from this dream revelation to him, he would have been unreasonable not to believe that he had indeed received a divine communication.

What is of the greatest consequence to us is the close connection of both these revelations with the Old Testament predictions. The Genesis expectation is realized by it. The Messianic expectation is realized by it, including the paradoxical person of the Christ as both the son of David and the Son of God. And the Isaian prediction of the Virgin Birth is fulfilled in the fact set forth. In other words, the fact is given to us by the witnesses as the fulfilment of the Scriptures; and if their testimony is to be accepted, it was the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

Here again is the absence of mere wonder for display.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF MARY AND JOSEPH CRITICALLY EXAMINED

Assuming that the accounts in Luke and Matthew are trustworthy reports of the testimony of Mary and Joseph, is their testimony sufficient to establish the fact? Does it not boil down to one witness and a dream of another, and the one witness vitally interested to clear her good name? If Mary once thought of the possibility of putting this story over, how immense the motive to deception!

Is it not conceivable that she invented this explanation of her condition and gave it to Joseph? There lay the predictions to hand for her to seize upon and interpret to Joseph; and there was for him the dream of ambition to warp his judgment. Why may we not suppose that they together thus invented this explanation, and told it at the beginning and through the years to one another and to the son, until they almost came to believe it themselves? But is it credible?

These are questions that must be faced frankly by those who believe in the fact. Let us face this supposition. The supposition involves these assumptions: that Mary was consciously false; that she cunningly imposed upon Joseph, so that he dreamed his dream and acted upon it; and that she lived this lie through the years, and taught it to her son. It also involves the supposition that Jesus either never pierced through all this deception to the reality or that he lent himself to the deception at least by his silence.

Or we may amend the conjecture by supposing that Joseph invented the explanation, and that the frightened Mary accepted it and played her role of falsehood at his instigation. But either supposition makes the story an invention by the guilty parties, in order to deceive; and that upon this lie was built up the claim of Messiahship for Jesus.

In the way of accepting such a supposition as explanation of the origin of the story of the Virgin Birth stands the character of Joseph and Mary as manifestly simple and sincere, as devout, as too devout to commit so great a sacrilege and blas-

phemy as fathering the child upon God and into the honor of the Messiahship; and in the way stands Jesus himself, too reverent of God and too utterly truthful to rest his claim on a lie. This supposition makes the Founder of Christianity a bastard, and founds his religion in a falsehood.

If this supposition is rejected, then we may suppose that Joseph and Mary never told or dreamed this story at all, and that it was invented, probably after Jesus' death, even long after, as an explanation of his exceptional greatness, and even of his supposed deity. That supposition we shall have to examine later; but for the present, if we suppose the accounts to have come originally from Mary and Joseph, we find them confirmed by their simplicity, by the absence of factitious support, and by their consistency.

The simplicity of the accounts is noteworthy. The stories run along without effort or strain, without any striving for effect, a simple narrative of believed facts, without misgiving or exaggeration.

Equally remarkable is the absence of fictitious proofs. If the story was invented, why is it not supported by additional proofs? It would have been easy to represent Mary as being always in such surroundings and such watchful care as to exclude any secret liaison; no effort is made in this direction. It would have been easy to suppose a more convincing revelation to Joseph than a dream; and we must suppose that the revelation is represented as coming in a dream, because Joseph in all simplicity believed thus it did come. It would have been easy to have supposed a birth

without the ordinary period of pregnancy. It would have been easy to invent accompanying miracles and wonders and demonstrations. Instead we have the narrative stripped clean of all such inventions. The very weakness of the evidence, if it appears weak on first consideration, is its strength, because it proves its sincerity.

But the story has remarkable confirmations, not given to convince readers of the truth of the story, but given at the time to convince Mary and Joseph that they were not themselves deceived. If Mary had a visitation from the angel Gabriel, so, she would learn, that Zacharias had had a visitation from the same angel. If the angel named her son, the same angel she would learn had named the son of Elisabeth. If the angel named her son Jesus, the same name was given him by the revelation to Joseph. Mary's own conviction that she was with child by the Holy Spirit was confirmed by the declaration of Elisabeth. Mary's right acceptance of the annunciation was justified by the sign given Zacharias in censure of his doubt. Here were four independent revelations given to four persons: Zacharias and Elisabeth and Mary and Joseph. If any one of these revelations makes a blunder, it will be discredited, and if any one of these revelations is discredited, they will all be discredited; but they all make good in every point. If any one of these revelations is established, it carries with it the other three.

IV. THE GENEALOGIES

Matthew and Luke give genealogies, Mat. 1: 1-17 and Lk. 3: 23-38. These genealogies are

thought by some to throw light on our question; let us therefore give them a careful examination.

Mat. entitles his "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." For "book of the generation" the Revised Version in the margin has "genealogy," which is doubtless the right sense. Beginning "Abraham begat Isaac," this genealogy goes on repeating the formula down to "Jacob begat Joseph." Then, instead of saying "Joseph begat Jesus," it adds to Joseph "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." This accords perfectly with the story of the Virgin Birth.

The remarkable thing is that Mat. neither here nor elsewhere tells whether Mary was a descendant of David or not, but does indicate (in 1: 20) that Joseph was descended from David, a fact which he had just set forth. The reasonable explanation of this silence as to Mary's ancestry is, either that this was not in dispute when Matthew wrote, or that he did not have his attention fixed on it. For some reason, he did deem it important to show that Jesus' legal father was legally descended from Abraham through David. And we must remember that according to Mat. Jesus was born of a married woman, and was in the eyes of the law the son of Joseph, and therefore Joseph's heir. So much for Mat.

Lk. on the other hand, begins his genealogy thus: "And Jesus, when he began *to teach*, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the *son* of Heli"; and goes on

back to " the *son* of Adam, the *son* of God." Here is a puzzle. We notice that the word *son* occurs in the original only in the phrase " being the son "; and we interpret " the *son* of Heli " not to assert that Joseph was the son of Heli, but that Jesus was the son of Heli, and " the *son* of God " not to assert that Adam was the son of God but that Jesus was the son of God. The Greek can certainly bear this interpretation; and to say that Adam was the son of God would certainly be surprising. If Lk. had meant to indicate that each name was the son of the next succeeding name he could have unmistakably done this in some other way or by inserting the word for *son* where the italics in our version show that the Greek did not insert the word *son*.

Moreover, there were no marks of parenthesis used in the Greek; and instead of printing the translation " being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the *son* of Heli " we might as well print it " being the son (as was supposed of Joseph) of Heli, of Matthat," etc. The article " the " before each name has no significance for us in English; the form of it in the Greek here shows what " of " shows in English. From this rendering we get the statement that Jesus, though he was supposed to be, or was reckoned, the son of Joseph, was really the son of Heli. On the supposition that Heli was the father of Mary, all difficulty disappears. It is true that in the list of names back to David (Heli, Matthat, Levi, Melchi, Jannai, Joseph, Mattathias, Amos, Nahum, Esli, Naggai, Maath, Mattathias, Semein, Josech, Joda, Joanan, Rhesa, Zerubbabel,

Shealtiel, Neri, Melchi, Addi, Cosam, Elmadam, Er, Jesus, Eliezer, Jorim, Matthat, Levi, Symeon, Judas, Joseph, Jonam, Eliakim, Nelea, Menna, Mattatha, Nathan) are forty names, while in Mat. covering the same period are only twenty-five names (Jacob, Matthan, Eleazar, Bliud, Achim, Sadoc, Azor, Eliakim, Abiud, Zerubbabel, Shealtiel, Jeconiah, Josiah, Amon, Manasseh, Hezekiah, Ahaz, Jotham, Uzziah, Joram, Jehoshaphat, Asa, Abijah Rehoboam, Solomon). But some names are omitted in Mat. in other parts of his table, and some may be omitted in the period after the Return; and forty generations in say one thousand years is not incredible, especially when we take into consideration that early marriage was the custom, and that the succession would be counted from the oldest son as a rule. And we can infer nothing against the correctness of Luke's table from the fact that some of the names in his list are the same as some of the names in the list of Matthew; for the same name is given to two persons in three instances (Levi, Joseph, Matthat) in Luke's list. This is one difference between the two lines; that the list of Mat. does not repeat a name, and the list of Lk. does repeat a name.

All supposed discrepancies vanish, as soon as we recognize that Lk. is tracing the ancestry of Jesus through Mary and her father Heli, and Mat. is tracing the ancestry of Jesus' legal father Joseph.

Another possible rendering of Lk. 3: 23 is "And Jesus, when he began, was about thirty years of age, being (as Joseph was considered *to be*) the

son of Heli." If we accept this rendering, we must suppose that Joseph was considered in some legal sense the son of his wife's father.

Even if there were discrepancies between the two genealogies that we could not solve, that would not discredit the testimony of Mary and Joseph. According to her account she was a descendant of David, for her son was to be the son of David. According to his account he was himself a descendant of David. This is the only point in their testimonies that the genealogies could contradict; and these they confirm.

Much has been made of a reading found in the text of the Old Syriac Gospels or Evangeleion da-Mepharrashe, in a palimpsest found by Miss Agnes Smith Lewis in Feb., 1892. In this MS. Mat. 1: 16 reads as follows: "Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called the Christ." It seems evident that in this MS. "begat" is used here in the conventional sense of 'became the legal father of.' For in this MS., in verses 18-25, is the same clear account of the Virgin Birth as we read in other innumerable MSS. This is not so strange; for according to Jer. 22: 30 Jeconiah really had no son, and we have therefore to understand that he whom he "begat" according to Mat. 1: 12 was simply his legal son. Similarly must be understood 1 Chr. 3: 17. This table establishes only what it was intended to establish, that Jesus was legally the son and heir of Abraham through David.

The real ancestry of Jesus we must learn from

the genealogy in Lk., which we must suppose gives the real line of descent from David down to Heli the father of Mary.

These genealogies affirm or imply the Virgin Birth.

V. THE BELIEF OF JESUS

If the testimony of Mary to the Virgin Birth is true, we may assume that she did not hide his origin from her son. There is no evidence that she published it indiscriminately. Her associates in Nazareth may not have known of it. Her marriage with Joseph probably took place soon after her return from her visit to Elisabeth, too early for her condition to become known unmistakably to them. They would not know, at the time of her departure, just the age of her pregnancy; and they would not become acquainted with the exact date of the birth in Bethlehem. And the flight into Egypt created such an interval of time from their departure from Nazareth till their return to it that probably no curious inquiry would disturb the peace of Joseph and Mary. Elisabeth would not publish the fact, probably; and she was probably dead, and Zacharias, not long afterward. Thus the secret would be known only to Mary and Joseph and Jesus. They would probably not communicate it to the other children of the family. These three, then, would probably be the only ones that knew Mary's story of the Virgin Birth. But surely Jesus would know; his mother would have told him.

But would he have proclaimed it unmistakably in his teaching? It would hardly have been like

him to do so. He might later in his ministry have spoken of it to his most intimate disciples, but hardly then for immediate publication. For what good purpose would it then serve? Hence his silence on the subject, if we find nothing from him on the subject in the reports that the Gospels give of his teaching, would argue nothing against the story.

But there are two occasions in which he used language which indicates that he knew about it and accepted it. When he was twelve years of age Joseph and Mary took him up to Jerusalem to the passover festival. And here is what we read in Lk. 2: 43-49:

> And when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not; but supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and they sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances: and when they found him not, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking for him. And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions: and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be in my father's house?

That Joseph and Mary are spoken of as his parents, and Joseph as his father, is in harmony with conventional probability. Even among us, when there is a child of one of the parties to a mar-

riage and not of the other, it is usually taught to address both as its parents, and both are generally spoken of as its parents, especially if the child was young at the time of the marriage.

But why should he call the temple "my Father's house" in such a connection as denies that Joseph was his father and affirms that God was his father? If the boy knew what Mary would or could have told him, that he was begotten of the Holy Spirit, and that God was his father and not a man, his speech is precisely what we might expect. But if he knew nothing of all this, how could he make the temple his father's house in a sense in which it was not every boy's father's house? It is at least impossible to deny that Jesus knew and believed his Virgin Birth.

Then when we read in Lk. 7: 28 how Jesus said concerning John the Baptist, "Among them that are born of women there is none greater than John: yet he that is lesser" (or younger) "in the kingdom of God is greater than he"; (the saying is reported also in Mat. 11: 11), we cannot but be struck by the unusual phrase "born of women." Why did he not say "begotten of men," or use the common phrase "men" or "sons of men"? If he believed in his Virgin Birth, and wished to include himself in his general statement, so as to make a comparison between himself and John the Baptist, he could not use such a phrase as "begotten of men," for that would have excluded himself; or "sons of men" or "men," for that would have been liable to be so understood. But by saying "born of women," a phrase found nowhere

else, he avoids the denial of a truth, while, according to his method of teaching, not thrusting forward a truth that would obscure what he was then meaning to teach. The phrase "born of woman," of which "born of women" is the plur., is used by Job in Jb. 14: 1 (of the child born in contrast with the unborn foetus, it seems), and (by way of reference to Job's use of it) by two of his friends in Jb. 15: 14 and 25: 4.

And this passage (Mk. 3: 35) must be considered: "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." So Mat. 12: 50. If Jesus had omitted "sister," we should have supposed that he included "mother" and "brother" in this statement because his mother and brothers had come to call for him, and that he omitted "father" and "sister" because his father and his sisters had not come to call for him; but now why does he bring in "sister" and not "father"? The most convincing explanation is, that he had no father in the sense that he had mother and brother and sister, and that he wished to include all the kinships that he had in the family.

In Jno. 5: we find Jesus in a close debate with his enemies. He claims God as his Father in a sense in which other men could not make the claim (verse 17); and they pressed this against him as making himself equal with God (18). He then proceeds to elaborate and justify his claim; and in the course of his argument he says, referring to his Father, "Ye have neither heard his voice nor seen his form." This was merely a commonplace,

unless it veils a denial that a man having literally voice and form was his father.

This controversy was renewed in 6:. Jesus has been speaking of God as his Father, and of his having come down from above. They said, " Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven." He continues his argument, and reiterates his claim to have come from heaven; but he keeps silent on the assertion made by them that Joseph was his father. These passages at least show us that Jesus had his attention sharply called to his being the son of Joseph. This he never admits in the exigencies of controversy, but uses language that may be understood as veiling a denial.

And Jesus was speaking often about God being the father of his disciples and about God being his father; but he scrupulously avoids speaking of him as " our Father." Even when calling them " brothers " in Jno. 20: 17, he says, " I ascend unto my Father and your Father." To have said " our Father " would have been to say what could have been understood to admit that there was nothing but a difference of degree in his sonship to God and their sonship; but he claims a unique sonship.

We cannot say that Jesus distinctly affirmed his Virgin Birth, but we may claim that he implied it. Certainly it is a reckless disregard of the evidence to deny that he ever alludes to it or indicates his belief in it.

We may go so far as to say that, when, in Jno.

8:, Jesus declares his enemies are sons of their father the devil, he has in mind Gen. 3: 15, where the seed of the serpent is set over against the seed of the woman; and that he may have thought of himself as specially the seed of the woman. But I would not build my argument on what may be, but only on what certainly is.

VI. THE ONLY BEGOTTEN

The term means what it says, only begotten, a father's only begotten child. A father might have other children by adoption; but this strictly means the only son that the father himself begets.

If the story of the Virgin Birth is true, Jesus was the only begotten son of God among men. There is a sense in which he is held to be the Son of God by eternal generation, that he is begotten of God from eternity; but this theological conception, whether true or false, is not expressed by the term only begotten. To call Jesus the only begotten is a brief way of saying that he had no human father, but that God was his father.

There is some textual evidence for making Jno. 1: 13 read "who was begotten" instead of "who were born." If this reading were established, then verse 12 would have to be treated as a parenthesis, and the "who" would refer to the subject in verse 11, that is, to "the Word," and verse 13 would be an explicit declaration that Jesus was not born in the ordinary way of human generation. But I do not press this doubtful reading into service.

The term is used in Jno. 1: 14, "And the Word

became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." It is to be noted that when the Gospel is speaking of his pre-existing dignity, he is called "the Word," the Logos, verse 1. Here it says, "And the Word became flesh"; and only when he has become flesh is he called "the only begotten." This only begotten was "full of grace and truth" as man, as visible and knowable man, as the only begotten.

After calling him "Jesus Christ" (17) the Evangelist proceeds (18), "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*." This affirmation is made concerning him who was Jesus Christ, who is the Word become man. God no one has ever seen; the only begotten Son hath declared him or made him visible. The only begotten Son is not mere "God," but God in flesh. By saying that he is in the bosom of the Father he does not say that as the only begotten he was in the bosom of the Father before he became flesh. Cf. "the Son of man, who is in heaven" in 3: 14.

It is a question whether Jno. 3: 16-21 is from Jesus himself or from the Evangelist; but it is not necessary to settle this question for our inquiry. Let us read 16-18, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged

already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." It is possible to suppose that the only begotten is here thought of as existing as the only begotten before he came into the world; but against this supposition are two considerations. The immediately preceding sentence (14-15) presents the Son of man as lifted up (crucified); and the sentence intervening between the statements about "the only begotten Son" does not use the term "the only begotten Son," but simply "the Son." Even if the "only begotten Son" were used to designate him as in his pre-existent state, that would not be decisive that the term connotes his dignity as in the pre-existent state; for when a name is once attached to a person as a designation of him it may be loosely used to designate him beyond its connotation. If, for instance, a man is spoken of as Doctor in telling some act that he did, that would not prove that he was already Doctor at the time of that act.

Hence when we read in Jno. 4: 9 that "Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him," we cannot infer that the person thus designated was the only begotten Son before he was sent.

John is the only New Testament writer who applies this term to Jesus Christ. He was writing to people who knew the story that he was begotten of God in the Virgin Mary. He first applies the epithet in a connection in which he refers to him as becoming flesh. He does not elsewhere use it so as

to make it mean that he was in this sense begotten before he was begotten in the virgin Mary. The term must have connoted to John's first readers that Jesus was divinely begotten in the virgin. It must have implied the Virgin Birth. It is sheer dogmatism to say that John, the author of the Gospel, knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. On the contrary, he endorsed it.

VII. THE SON OF GOD

Just as " the only begotten " originates out of the fact of His having been begotten by God and not by a human father, so the term " the Son of God." For the angel said to Mary (Lk. 1: 35), " The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." Here is the definite statement that the term originated from the fact that not a man but God was his father, originated in the Virgin Birth. If therefore a New Testament writer uses this term, he thereby endorses the story of the Virgin Birth.

We will examine its usage in the Synoptic Gospels. When Mat. 2: 15 represents the infant son of Mary by the Holy Spirit as God's Son, it is speaking in accordance with the record set forth in Mat. 1: 18-25. If we read in Mk. 1: 1 " The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," and find nowhere in Mk. an account of the Virgin Birth, we infer his acquaintance with the fact of the Virgin Birth, on account of which Jesus

was to be called the Son of God. When we hear God at his baptism calling him " my beloved Son " (Mat. 3: 17; Mk. 1: 11; Lk. 3: 22), we must understand the term in Lk. and Mat. in the light of its origin in the Virgin Birth story; and there appears no reason to understand it differently in Mk.

A like remark may be made about God's calling him " my son " at the transfiguration (Mat. 17: 5; Mk. 9: 7; Lk. 9: 35).

When Jesus speaks of himself as " the Son " in Lk. 10: 22 and Mat. 11: 27, we cannot forget his recognition of his Virgin Birth in Lk. 2: 49.

Even so Mk. 13: 32; 14: 62 and Mat. 26: 64; Lk. 22: 70.

Nor can we deny this connotation to " the Son " in Mat. 28: 19, where Jesus gives the great commission.

If the story of the Virgin Birth as given in Lk. and Mat. is true, or was believed by Luke and Matthew to be true, then they must have understood " the Son " and " the Son of God " in the passages cited from their Gospels in the light of that account; and if Mark knew this story and believed it, he must have had the like understanding. On the other hand, the very term itself implies some begetting by God peculiar to Jesus, and the Virgin Birth fits such implication.

It is therefore the sheerest dogmatism to assert that Mark knew nothing of the Virgin Birth and did not endorse it. To sustain this assertion, it would be necessary to show positively some other

origin of the term that would disprove the origin given in Lk. 1: 35.

VIII. PAUL AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

If Paul had made no reference to the Virgin Birth in any of his Epistles, his silence would not be evidence against it, unless in some passage he had occasion to deal with the matter; but even then we should expect him not to avoid the question. Yet his complete silence on the matter would be the absence of evidence where we might hope to find it.

When he says that Jesus Christ was of the "seed of David," (Rom. 1: 3 and 2 Tim. 2: 8) we can make no inference for or against the Virgin Birth. But this passage from Gal. 4: 4 is significant: "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law." Why should he write "born of a woman" instead of "begotten of a man"? Or why not say simply "born under the law"? Would not Paul's reasoning have been just as cogent with the "born of a woman" omitted? Yes, unless he felt that he must say that he was a man in order to say that he was under law, and yet could not say that he became a human being in the ordinary way because that was not so. Compare the words of Jesus, "born of woman" (Mat. 11: 11 and Lk. 7: 8). Paul's phrase is not just that used in Jb. 14: 1; 15: 14; 25: 14, "born of a woman," but more exactly "made of a woman." We must remember that these expressions "born of woman" and "born of a woman," although they sound so natural to us, are found only in these places in the

Bible, and were evidently resorted to for some special reason.

It is incredible that Paul knew nothing of the Virgin Birth, even if we suppose it a late invention. If an invention, it must have begun to grow early enough to get into Mat. and Lk. And if Paul had so much as heard of it, he could not have written Gal. 4: 4 without by implication endorsing it or at least avoiding to contradict it.

Thus goes into the discard the claim that Paul knew nothing of the Virgin Birth or altogether ignored it. It was a matter of course with him, so completely a part of his system of thought and belief as an apostle of Christianity that he only incidentally alludes to it. Like most of the facts and teachings of the Gospels, which he does not find occasion often to reaffirm explicitly, but which his whole system of belief assumes; so is the Virgin Birth. As well say that a man who in a treatise on optics never mentions explicitly the light of the sun, but only the light, had never seen the sun and had never so much as heard of its existence, as to say that Paul knew nothing of the Virgin Birth.

IX. THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The absence of allusion to the Virgin Birth in such a work as Revelation would hardly be negative evidence against it; yet we do find in it what may be an allusion to it, a piece of imagery that assumes it.

In the 12th chapter is recorded a vision, "a great sign in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and

the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered." This does not call her a virgin, nor even point out that her child was to be a son; but her description rather suggests that she is the personification of God's true Israel. Especially the twelve stars of the crown of her head, suggests something like this. "And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon standeth before the woman that is about to be delivered, that when she is delivered he may devour her child." The description of the dragon may suggest that he is the personification of Rome; but his being called the dragon, and his hostile intentions toward the woman and her child, remind us of Gen. 3: 15, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel." "And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days." The vision is symbolic; but the man child is evidently the Messiah, the Christ; and the woman would seem to be the true Israel, or the church under persecution.

So much for vs. 1-6. Now in vs. 7-12 there is war in heaven, and the dragon is cast down, and there is great rejoicing. Significant is the description of the great dragon as "the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." This in a way identifies the dragon with the serpent of Gen. 3: 15.

Vs. 13-17 add little or nothing for our inquiry, except that the serpent "made war with the rest of her seed."

The only thing in this vision as here recorded is the fact that the Child, who is the Christ, is the child of a woman, and nothing is said about his father. This fact does at least keep any from saying that the book knows nothing of the Virgin Birth. And it also completes the general emphasis of Scripture that the Christ is born of a woman.

X. SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE

In Gen. we found in the idea of the woman's seed becoming the Savior from the serpent some sort of emphasis upon the woman as over against the man in the origin of the Promised Seed. In the Old Testament in general we found an expectation of the Christ, or Messiah, yet to be, who was to be born in some extraordinary way, and to be in some special sense the Son of God. And in Isa. 7: 14 we found that there is foreshadowed the birth of this Coming One from a Virgin while she is a virgin. If this expectation raised by the Old Testament is not realized in the New Testament, then either the Old Testament or the New is discredited, or both.

Central in the New Testament is the testimony of Mary herself. She believed herself to be the mother of Jesus without a human father, God himself taking the place of the father. She was led to this belief by the announcement that it should be so by a messenger who first introduced himself to her as the angel Gabriel and greatly impressed her with his dignity, by the fact itself as she experienced it, and by the confirming circumstances of the revelation to Zacharias, of the revelation to Elisabeth, and of the revelation to Joseph. Her testimony bears every mark of competency, sincerity, consistency, ability to know and absence of improper motive and of credulity.

Secondary to the testimony of Mary, but its complement, is the testimony of Joseph. That he received his revelation in a dream argues that his story is not a fiction but a fact; else why have it to come in a dream and not in some more objective and spectacular way? Note the conditions in which he had the dream, the impress of reality of the dream itself, and the confirmations of the dream in its agreements with the other revelation and especially with that to Mary, and in the fulfilment of it. If a man who believed a divine communication was possible in a dream, as Joseph of course did, underwent his experience, he would be convinced of its reality, and ought to be convinced. Here is an honest witness, competent, not too credulous, and yet not too incredulous, capable of receiving such a revelation.

The authors of the Gospels of Mat. and Lk. themselves believed this story and make it each an

integral part of his narrative. Mat. brings forward a genealogy to show that Joseph was the legal son and heir of David; and that he therefore transmitted his heritage to his legitimate son Jesus, his legitimate though not his real or natural son. Lk. brings forward a genealogy to show that Jesus was the real blood descendant of David. We are not able now to verify these genealogies in all their parts; but we have nothing to discredit them.

Jesus himself knew about his birth and believed the story of Mary and Joseph. This he showed in explicitly recognizing God as his father as over against Joseph when he was twelve years of age, and by using the singular phrase " among those born of women " so as to include himself, to say nothing of other implications in the Gospel of Jno.

The Evangelist John uses the epithet " only begotten " and " only begotten Son of God "; he used this epithet at a time when the story of the Virgin Birth was well known; and he used this epithet when it could have no other meaning than the endorsement of that story. According to that story Jesus was strictly God's only begotten Son.

The term " the Son of God " as applied to Jesus Christ originated in his Virgin Birth according to Lk. 1: 35; and Mk. and the New Testament writers generally use this term, thus endorsing the story of the Virgin Birth. Paul uses the peculiar expression " born of a woman " when referring to the birth of Jesus, instead of " begotten of a man " or " son of man," choosing such an expression as would not deny the Virgin Birth. And Rev. uses

such imagery in one of its visions as forbids our saying that the author did not know or believe in the Virgin Birth.

The New Testament writers generally believed the Virgin Birth. It is woven into the whole New Testament history.

IV

DOCTRINAL SIGNIFICANCES

I. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

THERE are two views of Scripture, the historistic and the anti-historistic view. The historistic view holds that the Scriptures are good history, that they correctly present the facts with which they deal, that their statements of fact are true and trustworthy.

A historicist may believe that Scripture comes to have this characteristic by being the product of an inspiration that dictates the very words, so that the writers are but the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit, setting down the dictated words; another historicist may believe that Scripture comes to have this characteristic of historic fidelity by an inspiration which sets the writer upon ascertaining and verifying his statements of objective facts, and which subjects the writer to a divine influence in discerning the truth in matters not capable of objective verification. That is, two men holding to the same resultant historicity of Scripture may attribute that historicity to what each calls inspiration, but may differ widely in their philosophy of how this inspiration works, or even as to what precisely the inspiration is; but they agree in accepting the historicity of Scripture.

And they extend the same quality to all the

Scripture. Inasmuch as a poem or a prophecy or a proverb, appears in this history of revelation as a part of this revelation, such piece of sacred literature is accepted by the historicist as conveying a revelation from God.

The historicist of course believes that the meaning of Scripture is ascertainable; he believes in its intelligibility as well as its historicity. He does not determine beforehand how a given Scripture is to be interpreted, that is, he would interpret a plain narrative, an argument, an oration, a poem, a parable, or a piece of fiction, each as such, each according to its nature; but he accepts it as revealing truth from God, and to be accepted as the word of God, when understood in its intended sense.

The historicist does not deny the possibility of errors of translation, or the possibility of errors in the transmission of the text; and historicists may differ among themselves in matters of translation and of text, and in other matters of interpretation; but he is a historicist who believes in the veracity, the correctness, and the truth of Scripture, when rightly understood, and in its intelligibility. If one raises the speculative question, whether there may have been in the autographs, or first copies, such an error as " eight " for " eighteen," or " eighteen " for " eight," (cf. 2 Ki. 24: 8, which makes Jehoiachin eighteen years old when he began to reign, and 2 Chr. 36: 9, which makes him eight when he began to reign), the historicist is disposed to think that probably there was no such error in the autographs, but he does not have to deny the possibility

of such an error arising from a slip of the memory or a lapse of attention in making the autograph copy. For the important thing for the historicist is not mere mechanical inerrancy, but trustworthy historicity. His question is, Does the Bible tell the truth? does it tell the truth of fact and the truth of doctrine? Can we rest in it as bringing to us God's message intended for our enlightenment?

Now if a man is a historicist, though he may not go as far as some in his doctrine of inspiration, he will of course believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ; and if a man does not accept the Virgin Birth, then he is not a historicist. *Here is the dividing line.*

The anti-historicist may value the Scripture very highly, and may even believe in its inspiration in some very high sense; but he does not believe in its historicity. He will of course accept parts of it as reporting the facts correctly; but the mere testimony of the Scriptures to a fact does not convince him. He expects to find its statements in need of correction; he cannot trust the Scripture as such to tell the truth. So it is in narrative sometimes correct, and sometimes incorrect. In some places it reports the facts as they were; in others it misstates the facts more or less; and in others it reports as facts what never took place at all. And so it is in its teachings: it is sometimes altogether mistaken; at other times it mixes truth and error; and at other times it simply teaches a true view. It is not to the anti-historicist the word of God as far as it speaks; it is but the apprehensions that

men at the time had of what they supposed was the mind of God, but it is often far wide of the mark, and is to be corrected continuously by the superior enlightenment of later times, by later discoveries in the physical sciences not only, but by later discoveries in the sphere of morals and religion. Even its doctrine of God needs amendment in the light of better thought and deeper insight of after ages and of modern times. Not all anti-historicists will repudiate the truth of Scripture to the same extent; but every anti-historicist will repudiate the truth of Scripture to a large extent and to such a degree that what the Scripture says is not to him the final word. Scripture is not the Word of God.

Now the question of the Virgin Birth is a dividing question, which well draws the line of demarkation between these two views of Scripture. If a man holds that the accounts of the Virgin Birth as given in Mat. and Lk. are not trustworthy narratives of fact, and is not willing to rest upon this testimony, then he is an anti-historicist. Scripture testimony is not to him adequate evidence of fact. He may believe that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary begotten out of wedlock, and this story of the Virgin Birth an invention to cover up the fact; or he may believe that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary begotten in wedlock, and this story a later invention, for which they are not responsible, to explain the superiority of Jesus, or his supposed superiority; he may believe that this story got into the narratives through the credulity of the authors of the Gospels or through their wil-

lingness to glorify Jesus apart from the facts; or he may believe that this story is an attempt to suggest some explanation of the superiority of Jesus under the form of a narrative, understood in its first appearance as a sort of poetic myth and later becoming a piece of simple narrative of fact when the fact was not as stated; in any case he repudiates the historicity of the narrative, and makes the plain testimony of the Gospels false.

He not only repudiates the truth of these narratives, but he repudiates the Old Testament expectation which these narratives fulfil or would fulfil if they were true, and all the implications of the New Testament that seem to him to assume or endorse the Virgin Birth, if such there be. He says that the New Testament, from which alone we can learn the facts about Jesus, about his origin and life, about his deeds and teachings, about his death and his after condition, is not trustworthy history, but is largely myth and mistake. He says that the New Testament contains doctrines that are the mere opinions of the writers, sometimes their mistaken opinions or fancies, or their false reasoning. He says that the reports of what Jesus taught are themselves untrustworthy reports, that must be sifted and the chaff of error blown off by modern insight, even if he imagines that Jesus was himself superior to error. But for such an imagination he has no trustworthy historical evidence. And for every other teaching of the New Testament he must inspect it, assess it, and accept it in part or reject it in part, according to the better insight to which he can attain over Paul and John.

I am not saying that a man cannot be a devout believer in Jesus Christ and hold this view. Christ may shine to him through the untrustworthy records, as he regards them, and he may get hold of the genuine Christ; and a historicist may miss the real Christ with all his confidence in Scripture. Many of the Pharisees with whom Jesus Christ debated were historicists and failed to find him. The office of Scripture is to testify of Christ, in whom, and not in the book, is salvation. My object now is to show just what these two views are, the one judging the Scriptures and selecting the true out of the false; and the other finding in the answer of Scripture the final answer.

For to the historicist the predictions of the Old Testament come from the One Mind that is revealing itself throughout the Scriptures. It is his breath that blows in it all. He points in Gen. 3: 15 towards the fact that was to be; he points in the Messianic promise of the Messiah's sonship to God to the fact that was to be. He certified this fact to Mary and to Joseph. He acknowledged this fact at the baptism of Jesus, calling him his son. He revealed this fact to the disciples. He constructs a whole system of teaching in the New Testament, in which this fact is an integral part. God is himself responsible for this doctrine, the fact of the Virgin Birth.

It is so woven into the whole structure and content of the Scripture that the historicity of Scripture stands or falls with it. Whether God could have given us a Savior without this Virgin Birth, or a Bible that knew nothing of it, he has not done

so. The historicist believes that Jesus was born of a virgin, because the Bible says so: the anti-historicist does not believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, although the Bible says so.

II. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE MIRACULOUS

Belief in the Virgin Birth is belief in a miracle, and therefore makes the mind hospitable to belief in the miraculous. Let us see what are the marks of a miracle as we learn them from this miracle.

A miracle is not a violation of the laws of nature or a suspension of them. It may be a law of nature that under given conditions a virgin will have a child, and that these conditions met in the case of Mary. There may be millions of events falling out according to the laws of nature; and there may be only one event falling out according to that law. Whether an event takes place is a question of evidence; and if an event takes place which we thought before would be in contravention to a law of nature, we would immediately amend our law of nature so as to allow that event. A miracle is contrary to the ordinary, but not to the necessary. Miracles are not impossible events, though they are wonderful events.

A miracle takes place in nature, takes its place in nature, and accords with nature. It is an extraordinary phenomenon in the midst of ordinary phenomena, and becomes a harmonious element in the stream of phenomena. At least, such is this miracle. A child is conceived in a woman's womb; it passes through the ordinary stages of pregnancy;

it is born in the ordinary way; it is nourished in the ordinary way; it is subject to the ordinary dangers and receives the ordinary protection; it has the ordinary growth. Just one thing in the whole process is extraordinary: the original conception.

A Bible miracle is a wonder, but it is a minimum of the wonderful. If a child is to be born a child of God and not the child of a man, what could have been omitted that was not omitted in this case?

A miracle is the certification of a revelation. So this miracle certified the revelations given to Mary and Joseph.

A miracle is itself a revelation. It is a wonder that takes place in such circumstances and connections that the witnesses of it are by it given adequate evidence that God is himself then and there at work on purpose.

No miracle ever comes without a reason for it. It comes when needed in the course of revelation to certify to the revelation.

Such are Biblical miracles. Creation was a miracle, but man was made of the dust. The flood was a miracle; but the waters already in existence were used with their ordinary drowning properties. The group of miracles that center around the Mosaic revelation were needed to certify to that revelation, and were parsimonious of the wonderful. A wind blew all night to divide the Red Sea. In the wilderness no water was created. The second great group of miracles, the Elijah-Elisha group, came in the crisis of prophetic revelation to certify to the commission of those prophets. And the storm on Mount Carmel was an ordinary storm

from the Mediterranean. And the third great group of miracles that center around Jesus Christ were needed to certify to his prophetic authority; and they were parsimonious of the wonderful. If he fed the hungry multitudes, he used some loaves and fishes, and their hunger was satisfied in the ordinary way, that is, by food. The miraculous element in the Bible has a restraint and a dignity worthy of God.

But did these reasonable miracles ever really take place? To the mind that admits one of them the others may find entrance.

But if the miracle of the Virgin Birth, foretold in the Old Testament and standing at the threshold of the New Testament, is rejected, how can the other miracles of the Bible be accepted. If this miracle is incredible, what makes any other miracle credible?

And if a mind begins Jesus without a miracle, how will it not end him without a miracle? If contrary to the Gospels Jesus was the son of one Joseph in the beginning, how will he not contrary to the same Gospels lie lifeless in the tomb of another Joseph in the end?

But if we are convinced of the miraculous conception of the Child, then we may believe in the one miracle of revelation. This miraculous revelation may arise in the beginning of human history, bearing in its forefront the protevangelium; may ride the waves of the flood, and deliver the covenant to Noah; may come out of the dark ages that preceded, and deliver the better covenant to Abra-

ham; may call the covenant people out of Egypt, and instruct them from Sinai; may settle them in Canaan, and fight for them through the centuries of confusion; may give birth to a Christ in the person of Saul, purify the idea in the person of David, and develop the idea through the long centuries of failure; may swell in the songs of the Psalms; may thunder and weep and hope in the creations of the prophets; may rise from the dead out of Babylon; may sing with the angels over the birth of the real and fulfilling Christ in Bethlehem; may speak with human lips the words of God through the ministry of Jesus; may foreshadow renewal of life in the miracles of Christ; may watch Him fall by wicked hands to redeem wicked man; may keep vigil over His tomb till He breaks forth from it in glorious resurrection; may company with him during the forty days of his demonstration to his disciples; may point to him ascending to his Father; may become conscious of his presence in the gift of the Holy Spirit; and may complete this miracle of revelation in the books of the New Testament. Then faith may look at the finished whole, and submit itself to its infallible guidance, till he come again.

III. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

If one raise the speculative question whether one could believe in the deity of Christ without believing in his Virgin Birth, it may very well be said that we cannot say how the incarnation must be ef-

fected, by what method it must come, and therefore we cannot infer the Virgin Birth from the incarnation. But that is not the same as saying that we could retain our belief in the incarnation without belief in any method of it. If there was nothing extraordinary in his origin, how could we believe that there was something so extraordinary in his person as the incarnation? To the mind that denies the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and affirms no other method of his incarnation, but believes that he was the son of a human father and a human mother in the ordinary method, the way is open to the belief that there was nothing of the divine in him that is not or may not be in any other human being. But once let the conviction fix itself in the mind that the Virgin Birth of Jesus was veritably an actual fact, and then the mind is open to receive instruction concerning the union of the divine and the human in his paradoxical person.

The doctrine of Scripture on this subject is summed up in the term *the Son of God.*

But the mind that denies the Virgin Birth may easily reason thus: "Other men, especially other good men, are called sons of God; and Jesus is called the Son of God by way of preeminence, because he excels in those divine qualities which the term connotes. When the Scriptures say that he is the Son of God, or by other expressions represent him as Godlike or godly, or as having God dwelling in him, or even should they in an exceptional usage of terms call him God, we must not make him out to be God strictly, or to be divine in a sense dif-

ferent from that in which other godly men are divine. He may be, indeed he is, the most godly, the most divine, the most God-possessed man that so far has ever lived; but even so, he is not divine except in the sense in which any man may be or become divine.

"Even if we should find passages or books of Scripture that take the view of the orthodox Trinitarian theology, and worship him as God of very God, equal with the Father in power and glory, consubstantial with the Father but a distinct person; such Scripture would be what such creed is, the expression of the persuasion of the writer, and not a revelation of a fact or of a reality of philosophy. Such a Scripture would only show what impression the personality of Jesus made on a mind devoted to him, and lifted into pardonable extravagance in its enthusiasm, or led off into the inexact language of an imperfect metaphysics. The fact that a Biblical writer conceived the person of Jesus in terms of a philosophy which can now be seen to be a failure to grasp the deepest philosophical truth would be no sufficient reason why we should follow him in his erroneous philosophy. We may indeed use his language as a form of expressing the love and admiration which Jesus calls forth; but we must restrain ourselves as thinkers from letting our minds harden such rhapsodies as these would be into a fixed dogma."

But if a man accept the Virgin Birth, and thus has a mind open to the Scripture teaching, he will thus proceed, or may thus proceed, in his medita-

tion on this theme. When Jesus is begotten of God in the womb of the virgin, having no human father, then this holy thing born of her is called the Son of God, because so he is. He is the Son of God, and not the son of any man. He is therefore essentially different from any other born of woman. Others can be called sons of God, but no other is ever called the son of God; this is the only begotten Son of God. Here is a being in a class by himself, man as he is born of a woman, and God as he is begotten of God. This is the Word made flesh; this is God manifest in the flesh. This is not a man in whom God dwells and from whom God shines out, manifesting the uplifting power of God as a specimen of what a man may be by accepting the indwelling God; but this is a being unique in a dual nature, being God and man in two distinct natures but in one Person.

Then such a mind may observe this unique personality through his growth and activity in the limits and sphere of a manifest human life and death. He will see in him all human faculties and capacities, all human experiences save one; for he will see in him human virtue without human sin. In his freedom from the taint of sin he stands alone in the race, the one sinless man, the one man who is just what he ought to be, the Righteous.

And he will see in this Jesus a certain power not human. I do not mean the mere power of miracles and prophecy, with which other men have been endued in measure; but an indefinable dignity, an ineffable something for which we have no word un-

less we call it God or some name connoting the divine in the distinctive sense. He will hear him speak of himself with all calmness, without excitement, without conceit, without a trace of egotism, as the Lord and Judge of all men, as the Savior of man, as everywhere present and everywhen present to those who trust him, the Answerer of prayer and the Divine Companion, and as the Center and Reconciler in whom his Father and his people meet and know and love and live. And in saying all these things of himself he will not be using terms out of place or strained, but terms that fit, the natural expression of conscious realities.

Listening to him and observing him, learning to trust him and to love him, we shall get to obeying him as a matter of course. He will grow upon us until we cannot be satisfied with that connotation of the Son of God with which we started; but we shall hear with adoration of his existence with the Father before he was born, of his existence before Abraham was, of his being with God and being God originally, eternally. We shall put into the term some connotation of eternal qualities, and shall think of him as the Son of God before he became the son of the Virgin, of some inexpressible reality before time in the eternal relation of Father and Son. We shall adore without being able to understand; we shall understand what we cannot express.

We shall go on with the New Testament writers in their highest words and still higher thoughts, honoring him as we honor God while remembering

that he is Son, and not in calling him Son lowering him below God. No formulas can adequately express our adoration; but with all the fierceness of worshipers we shall resent all efforts to belittle him into the finest of the human race.

IV. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

The doctrine of sin has to do with its pollution, its guilt, and its punishment.

If the Virgin Birth is not true, and Jesus was simply a human being having a human father and mother, then I am reduced to this alternative: either he had the same innate bias to sin, the same pollution or taint, as other men; or all other men have the same capacity for moral uprightness as he. The two alternatives are really one.

If I assume the first alternative, and see in him one innately what I am, I become ashamed of his nature. I may admire his victory over his natural bias, and his wonderful moral ascent in spite of his taint; but there lurks in my mind a certain pity of him, a certain shame of his nature, a certain wish that I had a better Christ. I have seen, or have dreamed that I saw, the vision of the impeccable Christ; and it hurts me that I must now debase my ideal. I cannot work myself up to perfect trust in a tainted Savior. Give me back my sinless Christ!

If I take the second alternative, and believe that all other men have in them the same capacity for moral goodness as he; then I easily slide into the persuasion: "My sin is not the terrible thing that I thought it to be. It has not killed in me the potentiality for righteousness; for here is a man,

essentially like myself, with my very nature, who has climbed up to the acme of healthy moral life; and I am encouraged to climb up after him.

" There has been no fall of the race into universal inability, from which none can raise himself, for here is one who has raised himself, and the rest of us can do the same. The whole race of individuals begins, each immature, each with a germ that may grow into a species like Jesus or into a species like Judas; but it is a process of development from within. Every man is born a potential saint; and it is for each man to realize his potentiality. And Jesus shows us how.

" Guilt is a blunder of our imperfect insight into human psychology; there is strictly no such thing as desert of punishment. The sense of guilt is an uncomfortable feeling that arises when we see our actual inferior to our ideal, an uncomfortable feeling that should but spur us on to persevering endeavor toward our ideal, but which, in the crudeness of our thought, and in the terror inspired by false teaching, we too often misunderstand as a condemning voice of despair.

" Human nature is really not so bad, and not so helpless and hopeless. We are on the way to perfection. Each of us has in him a germ of moral beauty and purity and strength. Let us have faith in human nature; let us believe in ourselves. Look at Jesus, and cheer up, ye brothers of the Christ; for ye can play the game as well as he.

" Human nature is not dead, nor fatally diseased. Human nature does not deserve to perish. There is nowhere in the universe a curse or guilt, nowhere

a relentless justice that demands our death, nowhere an almighty executioner with drawn sword.

"Hell is a myth; guilt is a delusion. There are ideals; and the highest ideal, and the possibility of attaining it, is our heritage. Every man is born a potential Christ."

But if the Virgin Birth is a fact, then the moral superiority of Jesus cannot be pleaded in advocacy of the essential goodness of human nature, and every child of a human father is left by nature tainted with sin without the power of recovery. Then the perfection of Christ is the condemnation of all other men. Then sin, perversity, baseness, depravity, wickedness, iniquity, guilt, punishment, judgment, death, hell, and such terms are designations of terrible realities. They do not need to be explained away or minimized.

An infection of guilt has poisoned the human race, and every child is born with a latent leprosy.

Guilt is branded on the human conscience, sentencing the individual to death. He deserves his doom; and there is a Will of Righteousness omnipotent in the universe to inflict his doom.

Here are the opposing doctrines of sin and guilt, of human helplessness on the way to just judgment and through the judgment to inescapable death, on the one hand; and on the other hand, of immaturity to be outgrown, of ignorance to be enlightened, of progress into moral perfection. The Son of God who is not the son of a human father is the flame of light revealing the abyss of sin; the divine Jesus born of Joseph and Mary is the convincing

specimen that bids all to rise out of the temporary actual into the eternal ideal of human nature.

V. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

The doctrine of Scripture concerning atonement comprises the following points: sin has guilt, desert of punishment, or sin puts God under obligation to punish it; and, as he is righteous, he will fulfil his obligation. And here I am not using punishment in the sense of chastisement that aims at reformation, but punitive infliction that aims at destruction. Death is the penalty of sin. Also sin is pollution, uncleanness, defilement.

Hence, to save from sin, expiation and purification are both necessary. Purification from the pollution of sin is effected symbolically by water, washing away the pollution of the flesh; so that the Spirit of God purifies the spiritual nature from sin's defilement by changing the mind. When the will to sin is gone, the sin is gone; for sin is wrong will. Sin is in the motive, in the volitional nature; and to purify from the pollution of sin is to make the man what he ought to be in his purposes, choices, preferences. In other words, to bring him to repentance or change of mind, to regenerate him, to persuade him to be and to act as he ought, this is to purify him from the pollution of sin.

Expiation looks at sin as having guilt, as obliging God to inflict upon him its penalty. Expiation is symbolically effected by blood, the blood of the innocent victim made a sacrifice in the place of the sinner. Or, to apply the ritual language of the Old

Testament to the reality of the New, expiation is effected by the blood of Christ applied to the sinner, or the sinner's guilt is removed when he accepts the life that Christ gave up in his sacrificial death as the propitiation for the sinner's guilt. It is propitiation when thought of as pleading with God for the sinner's release from penalty; it is expiation when thought of as erasing the brand of guilt from the sinner.

Now the sinner never receives either the expiation or the purification without receiving both; but in the order of thought the expiation comes first, just as in the ritual the blood preceded the water, the altar stood before the laver.

So in the reality release from penalty brings about purification from pollution. The propitiation must be made by Christ, in order that the purification may be effected by the Holy Spirit.

Such, in brief, is the doctrine of the Old Testament ritual, and of the New Testament gospel. These are the conceptions, or the philosophy, of how sin is taken away, and man is brought into favor and fellowship with God. And this doctrine of atonement through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is the doctrine which the historicist sees plainly in the Scriptures and accepts as revealed by them.

And this doctrine he accepts as in a system of truth, in which system he adores the sinless Son of God offering himself as a sin offering for him, an expiation available for man because Christ is man, a propitiation effective with God because Christ is God.

But he who rejects the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and to do this is an antihistoricist in his estimate of Scripture, rejects, or tends to reject, this whole philosophy of the atonement. He sees in the death of Christ an appeal addressed to man, revealing God's love, and persuading them to reconciliation with God; but he does not see in the death of Christ an appeal addressed to God, and presenting to him an adequate ground for remitting the penalty of sin to all who accept this mediation.

The one takes away the obscurities wrapped about the pure truth in the bloody sacrifice, and never wholly removed by the prophets of deepest insight, nor even by Jesus as reported and interpreted to us by his disciples, takes away these obscurations now, in the fuller light of modern discovery and progress, and shows in all its beauty and glory the pure love of God that needs no propitiation of blood and death to persuade him to be kind to struggling man. The other accepts reconciliation with God by the death of his Son, strives to understand the mystery of the cross in the light of all that inspiration said before and of all that inspiration said after, and builds its hope on the revealed grace of God that provided this atonement, and not on the discovered greatness of man.

VI. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Those who admit that Jesus Christ is the Savior of men in any proper sense of the word hold to one or the other of these two views. One party believes in salvation by education, and the other party

in salvation by regeneration and education. That is, the one party holds regeneration necessary to start the process of salvation; both views agree that the process, once begun, is continued and completed in the growth of the germinal life; but the one party holds that this germinal life is already in the man by nature, and the other party, that this germinal life must be created at the beginning of the process of salvation in each case. Inasmuch as the creation of the germ of life is really the persuasion of the will to repentance, and this persuasion is by means of the truth playing upon the mind in the way of appeal to motive, and the awakening of the already existing germ is effected by similar means, the distinction between the two theories may seem to be more a matter of words than of theories; but really the distinction is fundamental.

The Scripture calls the initiation of this new life a creation, a being born again, a resurrection from the dead. These might be strong figures of speech in some instances; but certainly, when we take all such representations together, we can hardly think them to be hyperboles. If it is possible to assert a beginning which is not a mere derivation, to assert the initiation of a new life which is not the product of forces or causes resident in the subject, but the creation by an agent outside the subject and acting upon the subject, the implantation of a seed of life and not the development of a germ of life already resident in the subject; then the Scripture writers mean to make this assertion. And when we ascertain what the Scripture writers mean to teach,

that is God's word to us, according to the historicist view of the Scriptures.

The difference between the two views is like the difference about the birth of Jesus. The one party holds that Jesus is wholly derived by development from human parents; the other party holds that he is a new beginning not thus derived (insofar as he was not the son of a man but the Son of God.) So in regeneration the newborn child is indeed, if we may so say, mothered by human forces and agencies and grows naturally out of them so far, but is fathered by God in his creative power so that a life arises where before there was death, a life which belongs to a new species and is not a mere variation of the old species.

The two schools will be equally insistent on the nourishment and culture of this life after it has been generated, and equally insistent on producing the conditions of its generation or awakening; for the regenerationist believes that some of the factors of this regeneration are supplied by human agency, and the educationalist believes that all the factors are thus supplied. But the regenerationist will rely on the power of God put forth in each case on purpose to effect the regeneration; and the educationist will rely wholly on instruction and persuasion, on personal influence and environment to bring about the awakening of the dormant germ of life. For to him the germ of life is there, and only needs to be germinated; while to the believer in regeneration proper the seed of life is not there till implanted.

While the difference is hard to state in words, the

whole attitude of the two schools of thought will issue in practices utterly different. The one will teach the guilt and depravity of man, and his inability in himself, and therefore will know no way of saving men except by giving them the truth and waiting on the power of God to beget whom he will beget; the other will teach the nobility of human nature and the efficacy of ideals rightly and wisely presented, and therefore will know no way to save men except by appealing to their better nature and persuading them to be true to themselves and have confidence in themselves. The one will trust in Christ to raise the dead; the other will effect many awakenings and reformations without Christ, though it will gladly avail itself of the ideal so beautifully and successfully furnished by him.

The one way of salvation is salvation by Christ; the other is salvation according to the method of Christ. According to this view, Christ shows men how to save themselves by developing their better selves; according to the gospel of grace he saves men.

VII. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Mat. 27: 50-61; Mk. 15: 37-47; Lk. 23: 46-53; and Jno. 19: 30-42 all record the explicit assertion that Jesus died on the cross. They report also, that the executioners pronounced him dead; that his side was pierced with a spear, and there came out blood and water; that after this he was taken down from the cross, wrapped in clean linen, and laid in the tomb; and that after thus handling his

body his friends believed him dead. Moreover Mat. 27: 62-66 certifies that his enemies satisfied themselves that he was dead, sealed his sepulcher, and had it guarded, against the possibility that his body might be stolen; but they were convinced that there was no possibility of his not being dead. This testimony, unconsciously it may be, but none the less effectually, shuts out the possibility that he had not died, and the possibility that his body was stolen and a fake resurrection was imposed upon those who were so keenly concerned.

Mat. 26: 1-7; Mk. 16: 1-7; Lk. 24: 1-9, 22-24; Jno. 20: 1-14 testify that the tomb was empty and the body gone. Stress is laid on the absence of the body. If the testimony is to be believed, the body was gone; and this absence of the body must be accounted for. When the women were told that he was risen, and the absence of his body was offered to them as evidence that he was risen, they believed that his resurrection involved the rising of his body,—they believed in his bodily resurrection.

When the company of women met Jesus, saw him, heard him, and held him by the feet (Mat. 28: 8-10), they believed in his bodily resurrection.

Jno. 20: 14-18 reports that Mary saw him; that he looked like a living man; that she recognized him by his voice; and that she held him by the feet. For he told her to quit holding him, as he had not yet ascended. Mary and the women certainly believed in his bodily resurrection. There were strange things: his grave clothes were left in the grave, and his own every-day garments were divided among the soldiers who crucified him; and

yet he appeared to these women in such form or appearance that they never thought about his clothing or how he got clothing. But they would have testified to his bodily resurrection.

We lack details of his appearance to Simon (Lk. 24: 34), but not of his appearance to the two disciples at Emmaus (Lk. 24: 13-35). Here was appearance, voice, manner, and all the manifestations of body; but here also was that strange fact, "he vanished out of their sight." The two disciples who witnessed this appearance would believe in the bodily resurrection, but would believe also that the body had undergone change and had properties that it had not had before the death.

That same evening he appeared to the company of disciples in Jerusalem (Lk. 24: 36-43; Jno. 20: 19-23). The doors were shut; yet he suddenly stood in the midst of them. He showed them his hands and his feet and his side, and proved to them that he had flesh and bones. And he ate a piece of broiled fish before them. Thus he convinced them that he was not a ghost, notwithstanding his ability to appear to them behind their closed doors without opening the doors. They could not but believe in his resurrection of body; they could not but believe that he was risen in the same body in which he was crucified.

A week later he appeared to the company of disciples again (Jno. 20: 24-29). This time he told Thomas to put his fingers into his wounds received in his crucifixion. So he convinced Thomas.

He appeared as he had promised, to above five hundred at once (I Cor. 15: 6; Mat. 28: 16-20).

Some doubted at first whether it was the same Jesus whom they had known; but he assured them.

And at his ascension (Lk. 24: 50-53; Acts 1: 6-11). Just before he was taken up from them, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. Did he lift up the same hands that he carried about before his death?

Thus they saw him, heard him, handled him, had him eat before them, and he explicitly denied that he was a spirit and asserted that he had flesh and bones. He convinced them that he stood before them in the same body in which he was crucified. About this there can be no question, if the Gospels correctly report the testimony and it is worthy of our belief.

Now what shall we do with this evidence? The historicist accepts it as true and trustworthy, and believes with the disciples that Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the same body in which he had lived and in which he died, and in this body ascended. They believe that the body was changed, greatly changed, so that it was indeed a different body, but yet the same. They believe that the risen Christ lived and appeared in a body, and that this was identical with the body that he had before lived and died in, although transformed never so much. Whatever changes his body underwent at his resurrection, or between his resurrection and ascension, or at the ascension, however much it may have been changed or spiritualized, they believe that he rose and appeared and ascended and continued in a body, his own body. When Paul says that his people do not rise with the " same " body,

they look again and see that Paul does not say "same." And the very comparison that he makes, the plant from the seed, preserves the identity through all changes. He does say that the resurrection body is incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual; but he does not deny that the risen saints have a body, nor that it is identical with the body in which they have lived in this life, although it is changed, transformed, glorified. He does say that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," "flesh and blood" being the expression which connotes corruption and mortality; but he does not thereby contradict the "flesh and bones" that Jesus affirmed of his resurrection body. Paul makes the resurrection body spiritual and immortal, each man's own body glorified; but he does not deny body to the risen saints.

But some who deny the Virgin Birth against the narratives deny also the resurrection against the narratives. Some of these deniers of the Virgin Birth, seeing that Christianity without the resurrection of Christ is absurd, agree to allow a resurrection, but not the resurrection of the body, or in any event not the resurrection of the same body.

But we know the resurrection of Christ through the testimony of the witnesses. The very evidences which convinced them and must convince us are proven inadequate, if they do not establish his bodily resurrection. When the witnesses tell us that they saw him, heard him, handled him, saw him eat, identified him by the crucifixion wounds, and certify to us that it is the Jesus whom they knew in his ministry; if we smile at them, and say,

"O you are mistaken, we believe you that Jesus lived on, and had a sort of spiritual resurrection, but we are too well informed to swallow your story that he had flesh and bones," then we find them false witnesses of God. Between their clear certainty and our hazy speculation is a great gulf fixed.

VIII. THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE COMING AGAIN

There is much said in the New Testament, to say nothing of the expectation in the Old Testament not yet fulfilled, about the coming of Christ again; indeed, this is the great hope.

There are three ways of interpreting these statements. One is to assume that in them there is given to us a definite scheme of future events, so that we may know beforehand what and when to expect this or that, and to understand the pictorial descriptions as we would understand them if they were plain narratives of the facts after the facts have taken place. In order to harmonize the different statements the users of this method will here and there yield to necessity and adopt forced or figurative interpretations; but they prefer generally literal, or what they call literal, interpretations. But their governing principle is to make the statements agree with history up to the present; and then project future history. And they are possessed with the expectation of some great event in the near future.

Two things result from this method. One is that interpretations change through the centuries and

the years, as the expectation of some great event in the near future is disappointed. Another is that the users of this method are at all times a minority, but an earnest minority, intolerant of all who do not accept their interpretation.

A third result is that many either reject this view for none, becoming on this subject agnostics, or go over to the other extreme, which virtually denies that there is to be any coming at all. In order to reach this denial and rest in it, forced interpretations are resorted to, and fanciful interpretations called figurative; and the one effort is to eliminate all features that would leave a definite doctrine, and to eviscerate the statements of their meaning. The users of this method tend to say little about the coming again, and so to ignore it as having little or no practical value.

Now comes in that view of Scripture which is most consonant with denial of the Virgin Birth, and which finds in Scripture misapprehensions of the past and therefore expects misapprehensions of the future; and those who hold this view tend, on the one hand, to insist on those interpretations which make Scripture to be most contradictory of historical facts and most inconsistent with itself. They may at most get out of all the confused and mistaken statements a hope that the teachings of Christ will gradually prevail among men until they permeate and control human institutions, that is, his real teachings as sifted from the errors of their first reporters and from the errors of later interpreters, the pure teachings as now apprehended by the best minds among modern critics.

Now between these extremes of fanaticism and agnosticism those who accept the Scriptures as revealing the will and promises of God, as revealing them clearly and intelligibly, ought to find principles of interpretation that will get the following results: 1. Will interpret every statement in its intended sense, as literal, figurative, or what not. There may be paradoxes in Scripture, puzzles, and hidden meanings; but if so, they are findable and can be disentangled and understood. 2. Will interpret every statement in its own light rather than in the light of its supposed fulfilment. A prediction, to be profitable, to those to whom it was given, must have been intelligible to them. It is possible that a prediction was given of purposely hidden meaning; but if so, those to whom it was given could have seen that it was of hidden meaning and must wait on the event to be understood. But the true interpretation finds out what was intended and holds to that meaning. 3. Will find in the teachings about the coming again of our Lord much of practical value, and much that is indispensable to a full understanding of his teachings. If we find the truth, we shall be able to say, and to say it with enthusiasm and joy, Our Lord cometh.

I am not here endeavoring to set forth the right view; but I would venture to sound two notes of warning. One is to those who really revere the Scriptures as the infallible word of God, and come to them to learn his mind. Let us be tolerant of each other and of our own limitations. There may be much of this teaching of the coming again of Christ that I cannot myself, or do not myself, alto-

gether understand; but surely some of it is within my grasp. Let me take what I can and make use of it. Let me live in its light and consolation, and wait for fuller knowledge. And let us not be intolerant of each other. Let us get together and study together with humility, and endeavor to come to agreement. If I think I see what few others see, let me be humble and remember my fallibility. Let us seek to agree.

And may I venture a word of warning to those who reject the Virgin Birth and with it have a tendency to empty the Scriptures of objective content? Jesus and his apostles certainly had a great expectation, which we speak of as his coming again. If you cannot make anything of it, and they seem to you by reason of their vagaries on this subject largely unworthy of being implicitly followed as guides and the Guide, may it not be that herein you have missed the way? Since your mind is so different from the mind of Christ and the Apostles on this matter, may it not be that on other matters your mind is different from the mind of Christ and his Apostles?

V

CONCLUSION

I. SUMMARY OF THE BEARING OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

THOSE who accept the Virgin Birth will accept certain other views, or will tend to accept them, or will at least be unable to disprove them; and those who reject the Virgin Birth will accept certain other views, or will tend to accept them, or will at least be unable to disprove them. This set of views let us, for convenience, call Modernism; that set of views, Scripturalism.

The Scripturalist believes that Jesus Christ, as a matter of fact, had no human father, but was born of a virgin mother. He finds this expected or foreshadowed in Genesis, in the Old Testament expectation of the Messiah, and definitely in the Isaian prediction. He finds it certified by the testimony of Mary and Joseph in the New Testament, and amply corroborated. He finds the fact endorsed by Jesus, implied in the epithet Only Begotten, and originating the title The Son of God. And he finds it known to Paul and accepted by him. He believes it simply upon the testimony of Scripture.

For the Scripturalist believes that the Scriptures is the intelligible and trustworthy word of God, reliable in both its facts and its doctrines. Com-

mitted to no mere mechanical theory of inerrancy, nor frightened away from confidence in it by the fear of not being sufficiently critical, he accepts the say-so of Scripture as final authority to him for both doctrine and practice.

Accordingly the Scripturalist accepts the miracles recorded in Scripture as historical facts, though little concerned with philosophical disputations about miracles; sees in Jesus Christ two distinct natures, man in the fullest sense, and God in the deepest sense, alone sinless among men, and truly the Son of God in a sense in which no other being can be said to be; finds all other men incurably tainted with sin and cursed with its guilt, unless saved by his atonement; sees in him the propitiation and expiation of human guilt by his suffering as a sin offering substituted for the sinner who accepts him by faith, which faith is at once the beginning in the sinner of a new life created by God and the man's own volitional commitment of himself to Christ; believes that he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven in his body, though changed and glorified; and expects him to come again in a coming at once manifest and spiritual, personal and subjective, to all his people and to each of them, uniting them and himself in a society of complete persons like unto himself in soul and body.

But the Modernist believes that Jesus had a human father like other men. The indications of an expectation of some wonderful birth from a virgin are poetic dreams or conceptions that come from other sources in the stream of Old Testament hopes. The New Testament has unfortunately

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been corrupted by the myth of a virgin birth of Jesus; but it rests on inadequate evidence, or is altogether a pious invention, if it be not in its first origin an invention to cover up an ugly fact. Jesus knew nothing of it, nor did Paul, nor any New Testament writer but Matthew and Luke. The same source that got the story into these two books may have got some like indications into other documents, but there is no other unequivocal testimony, even if this is to be so considered.

The Modernist believes that the Scriptures are the result of myths and legends that indicate the beliefs of the people of the age in which they originated, with correcting and better views introduced from time to time, but never getting rid of all the errors. The same is true of the New Testament, only that here the finer insight of Jesus lifts him far above all other teachers, although unfortunately he was so misunderstood and misrepresented even in the Gospels, to say nothing of the Epistles, that we cannot take their reports of his teachings and deeds without critical excisions. In no proper sense is the Scripture authority.

Accordingly the Modernist rejects the miracles, or such as he cannot reconcile with reason and scientific law, as we have come to know them since those times of childish superstition. Jesus is a man like other men, differing in this that God was in him to a degree in which he appears not to have been in any other man. What he was other men can be. Let him become our inspiration and example, and let us live and even die for others as he did; and we may approach him, and there is no

real reason why we may not equal him. We are saved by developing the best that is in us, and eliminating or overcoming or outgrowing our imperfections. Of course, the conception of a bodily resurrection is too crude for the modern mind to entertain; but the man who lives up to his best will rise into a higher life after death.

Not all Scripturalists hold fully all this system of views here ascribed to them; nor do all Modernists go so far in freeing themselves from the conceptions of an age and culture thought by them to be now out of place; but here is what the two systems tend to become. Which is yours?

II. OBJECTIONS TO THE ARGUMENT

To the argument that I have built up I hear the modernist making objections, as follows:

"The whole argument proceeds upon an unsound philosophy. Back of all phenomena is a Cause, and we call it God. But God is inscrutable. He is even inconceivable by the human mind, because no human concepts encompass him. So we have to conceive him as if he could be comprehended in the concepts of our philosophy, and we conceive him as a person. But He is more than a person; he is not comparable to any object of our human thought.

"Accommodating our limited capacity to the necessity, we may conceive and represent God in concepts and by terms that we know are inadequate and only the picture of the truth. He is everywhere and at all times; or rather space and time are themselves but concepts in which we hide our

ignorance. But he is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. He is the universal force of energy, the ever developing potency, the continuous becoming. He is power, life, force, mind, self-realizing mind.

" He hides and reveals himself. All creatures are revealing agencies, revealing God. He shines in the light; he sounds in the thunder and the song. He is in every bird and in every flower. He is in all history. He is in every living thing; he is the universal life. But especially does he dwell in the human mind. He is that which lives in us. Preeminently in the human is God revealing himself, showing himself its sustaining and continuing power, its continually recreating power.

" He may dwell in one man to inspire him to scientific invention; in another, to inspire him to poesy; in another, to inspire him to philosophy; in another, to inspire him to religious insight. There have been many religious geniuses. In these God-filled men, the prophets of the race, was God. Some of them have seen deeper than others. Nor have they always seen alike or in harmony. But together they have led the race upward in its search after God. But in the religious geniuses of the Hebrew people are to be found the prophets of deepest insight, and through them God has striven, as it were, to express himself. Finally in Jesus, the finest product of the finest race in the matter of religion, God has come to his highest revelation.

" Now the whole idea of a miracle is abhorrent to the instructed mind. A miracle, thrust in to interrupt and disarrange the orderly process of evolution, is unthinkable to the mind that has once

grasped the onward progress of the universal Force to its higher and higher manifestation in the inspired mind. Inspiration and miracle are mutually exclusive.

"So the notion of a Virgin Birth is monstrous. It would be to abandon the straight upward course of gradual progress, to repudiate the method of the reproduction of the race, and to create outside of the race, outside of humanity, an external savior, an external savior whose origin would be the confession that the method of the Mind that had been at work in all the process of development of the past was a mistake. It would be to abandon the plan and method of revealing God to man by an inner realization of God in man. The whole value of Jesus as a specimen for our imitation, and for our encouragement in the slow progress upward, would be taken away.

"Or consider how unscientific is such a notion. Through millions of ages millions of species have evolved from one simple beginning. In every step in all these billions of steps the onward urge has gradually made its way by an unerring law, without a break or exception, without a twist or deflection. In astronomy, in geology, in biology, in the human being, everywhere in all the ages, there is no exception. To the modern mind the birth of a child without a human father would be an unaccountable and irrational freak of nature; and freaks are not to be attributed to Infinite Wisdom.

"And there are the results of modern criticism, analyzing the documents that make up our Bible as it now is, tracing the varied materials to their

many sources, and following the wonderful transformation of them from myth and legend until gradually they have taken their places in this great religious library, in which we see how the human mind has struggled into better and higher conceptions, and attained to nobler realizations of God, from time to time discarding errors and imperfect conceptions, until the process culminates in Jesus, the religious genius and leader of the race. And shall we now arrest all progress in religion, throw away all the lessons of progress in all other spheres of thought and inquiry, and stop in this upward progress of the race out of superstition and immorality? Shall we now deny that God can any longer live in men to lead them up the heights to broader vision? Modern criticism has demonstrated the imperfections and positive mistakes in the Bible; and has thus set religion free from a fixed and final creed, that it may be a living and growing thing, and not a mummy wrapped in dry and rigid dogmas.

"The dogma of the Virgin Birth may serve a good end in helping minds that are yet in the medieval stage of development to construe Jesus so as to revere him; but those minds that no longer need such a temporary refuge must be allowed the right to carry on their religious life and do their share in world betterment without being hampered by so grotesque a conception."

III. ANSWER TO THE OBJECTIONS

I hear a Scripturalist replying thus:

In appealing to Biblical criticism, the business of

which is to determine what facts have taken place, you assume the possibility of such a science. For the Bible is a fact, a record or pretended record of revelations; and if there may be any science of Biblical criticism, then it is possible on existing evidence to determine now how far its statements of fact are true, and whether it does contain any revelations. To begin with the assumption that there could be no revelations, and that its statements of fact could not be true, is to assume that the cultivation of a science of Biblical criticism is a foolish waste of time. There is no need to disprove by historical evidence, critically sifted, that this or that did not take place, if we already know philosophically that this or that could not have taken place.

Nor can the scientific historian determine before inquiry that any class of facts capable of being certified to by evidence has never taken place. How do we know what has taken place unless by evidence? Did a nation of two or three millions once cross the Red Sea on foot? If so, it could have been known at the time to competent witnesses, and their testimony could have been preserved and recorded for after ages. If anybody claims that such an occurrence did take place, the claim is properly met by a challenge to submit the evidence, such evidence as in the nature of the case could be available, but not by a philosophical disquisition attempting to show that such an occurrence could not have taken place. So if once a multitude of several thousand people were fed a satisfying meal on a few loaves and fishes, such a fact lay within the sphere of observation; and the only sci-

entific method in an inquiry about it is to get and weigh the testimony, and not to argue against the competence of all evidence and forestall a trial. So also concerning such an event as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If he rose from the dead, and some one would have me so believe upon some speculative ground without the testimony of competent witnesses that knew him alive and dead and alive again, I may be excused from considering the claim; but if I am to pronounce judgment in the case after the presentation of evidence, then I cannot dismiss the witnesses unheard on the ground that I know such a thing never happened. My knowledge that such a thing never happened, if I have that knowledge, must rest upon precisely the sort of evidence that is offered to prove that in this case it did happen. All discussions of the nature of miracles is out of place; the scientific mind wants to hear and weigh the evidence, and then decide.

I do not know what may take place except by experience, the experience of myself and others; and then after the facts I may build a philosophy of the facts, but not before. Here is a class of facts called miracles, facts of such a nature that, if they occur in certain connections with teachings that claim to be prophetic (revealed), they will convince reasonable minds acquainted with their thus occurring that the teachings are revealed; and these facts fall within the sphere of observation, if they have occurred before competent witnesses and by them could be certified to us. To talk to me about the impossibility of such events is like chil-

dren babbling about a total eclipse of the sun or the fall of a meteor, claiming such a thing impossible. I am not asking whether miracles are possible; I am asking whether they did occur. I am not disputing whether the Virgin Birth could take place; I am asking whether it did take place. After I determine the fact this way or that, it will be time enough to philosophize about it.

Now I have examined the evidence, and I am convinced that a revelation has been made. Now and then, where such certification would have been necessary, I find miracles coming in as needed for such certification; but a revelation has come. In the far beginning of human history, God speaks to man, promising him deliverance from the evil power. God teaches him by the flood, and scatters him from Babel. He calls a people in Abraham, redeems them out of Egypt, and organizes them through Moses, with covenant and law. God leads them through ages of conflict and discipline, training them by ritual and tabernacle, by temple and song, by prophetic rebuke and chastisement, giving them promises of a Messiah and gradually educating them for something better in the future. God adds teaching to teaching, never departing from the line first projected but ever developing that teaching from age to age. God comes to this people in his Son, a son of the race and yet the only begotten Son of God, gives a revelation in word and life, in death and glorification, making a new revelation, and yet the same old revelation clearer and fuller, of salvation from sin through his Son offered up as a sacrifice to expiate their sins. And God speaks

from his glorified Son to his people, endues them with his Spirit, and sends them into all the world, with this message to all men.

But let me go back and review again this progressive revelation as it grows through the ages. At every step of its progressive development there is promise for the future, prediction for the future, Covenant and fulfilment. It thus exposes itself to detection if a delusion; it thus challenges unwilling minds to its claims, and locks itself from successful assault as a system of revealed truth, coming down through the ages, and ever growing as it comes.

This progressive revelation is one. Every fragment of revelation made here or there falls into its place as part of the whole, a great unit. Did this or that miracle or deed or prediction occur? Rather this revelation has occurred, this one miracle running through the centuries. Here is the FACT OF REVELATION. It is a rock, immovable, unassailable. It stands forever. The storms may blow, and the billows may dash against it. It still stands. Enemies may climb up its sides, and endeavor here and there to chisel off a piece. They only succeed in chiseling off encrustations that hide its polished splendor. They fall from their high perches into the gulf below; but there stands God's Lighthouse for the ages.

This is the miracle that abides. This is not something within alone. This is an object, a fact without, the one fact that stands in history and shines in every direction. This is the miracle of miracles.

Another miracle is going on, a subjective fact. This revelation from without is beating at the eye-

lids of the race, pouring its light into the human mind. With it as an instrument God is working his other great miracle, age after age, in the regenerating of souls and of institutions. Something is rising in human history, a new heaven and a new earth, a society of love and justice and power, the kingdom of God. It comes, it grows. Now it may be submerged by clouds and billows, but ever again and again it flings up its rising sides in the sunlight. It laughs at decay. This miracle is predicted and promised by that miracle. This mighty growth is the temple of God that the centuries build. Within this new, rising in the midst of the old, there is life and growth, power and knowledge, continuance and immortality. Is Jesus Christ ever coming? He is in this reality. He dwells within it. He comes; we work. He comes; we suffer. He comes; we wait, but run to meet him. Lo, this mighty pile takes form, becomes intelligible, and stands there in the morning that is to be the glorious Christ and his people, the second incarnation of the Son of God.

"THE WORD OF GOD ABIDETH FOREVER."

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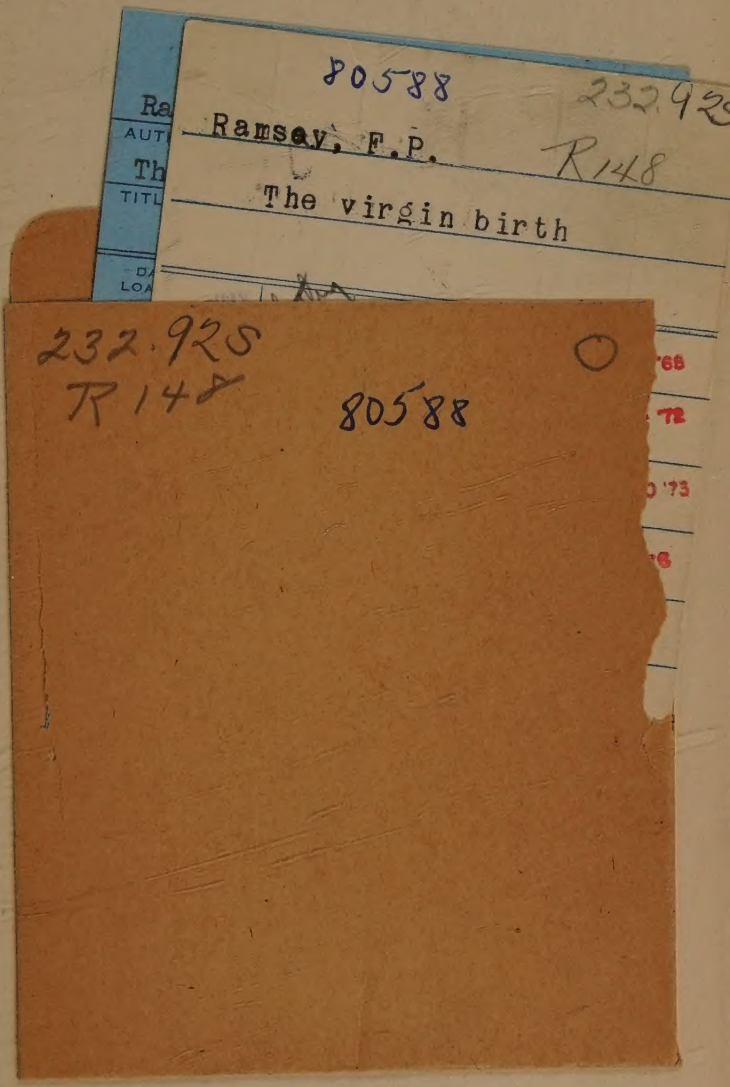
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